

SIAG

(Socitm Information Age Group)

Response to the strategy document:

Transformational Government

Enabled by Technology

Feb 2006

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A. Introduction

The Society of Information Technology Management (Socitm) was founded in 1986 as the professional association for ICT managers working in and for the public sector. Members are drawn primarily from local authorities but also from the police and fire services, housing authorities and other locally delivered public service. Managers or consultants from organisations supplying ICT products and services to the public sector, or which support public services in other ways, may also join the Society.

With over 1900 members from 550 different organisations including 98% of all UK local authorities, Socitm provides a widely respected forum for the promotion, use and development of ICT best practice. It also plays a leading role in the implementation of local e-government in the UK. More recently Socitm has been active in what it has termed 'e2 government' which includes a close focus on business transformation.

The Society is a significant provider of advice and guidance on ICT, e-government and transformation issues to local authorities and the wider public sector. Socitm, through one of its working groups (SIAG), had input into the formation of the strategy through consultations and workshops with members and as such retains a strong interest in the future development with regard the impact upon members and their organizations. This initial response is brief by design as we believe the crucially important stage for the local government community is what happens next in establishing the details and implementation plans for the strategy as it applies to that community.

1. Our response to the recently published Transformational Government strategy document is brought together from a combination of sources including responses from our members, the output of meetings held with various stakeholders and partners and reports from associated groups. Many of the comments will in themselves raise further questions and issues or presuppose particular courses of action and we are happy for this to be the case. The underlying assumption behind this is that the process for refining or, more specifically, interpreting the strategy appropriately for its various audiences is adequately addressed in the next phase of strategy development. Should this not be the case, or should local authority stakeholders not be engaged then our view of the strategy and its potential relevance to local government would need to be revisited.
2. Socitm welcomes the strategy, its aims and its clarity of structure and believes it represents a significant platform for the next phase of the transformation of government. It is framed in such a way that the value of existing e government building blocks can be maximised while moving away from what is often viewed as a technology driven agenda to what is increasingly understood as a technology enabled agenda. As a platform it is a good place from which to view the required direction of travel, a good starting point for those who have not yet begun the journey or a milestone and benchmark for those who have. It represents a series of challenges for local and central government alike which should not be taken lightly or prioritised inappropriately.

B. Clarifying and interpreting the vision

3. We acknowledge the importance early in the document of clarifying two different but interdependent elements of the vision as *'not just about transforming government through technology. It is also about making government transformational through the use of technology – creating and retaining the capacity and capability to innovate and use technology effectively as technology itself develops.'* (para 9 , p4)
4. The structure of the strategy into three clear areas of focus is helpful although perhaps not quite as detailed as is required to guard against misunderstanding and to allay fears that the strategy may be proposing a return to older 'silo oriented' and 'wholesale outsourced' ways of working.
5. Although the strategy is extremely light on local authority specific content this must inevitably be the case for a document whose remit is the whole public sector. Any other approach would result in yet another unwieldy and largely unread government publication. However, this does impose the requirement of further detailed work, in close consultation with local government, to ensure that the intent of the strategy is interpreted for the local authority community in ways that, while remaining true to the overall direction, do so with regard to specific local and regional priorities taking account of the not inconsiderable progress already made by many local councils.

C. Issues raised and comments received

6. Citizen centric: The problem is how to address the local/neighbourhood agenda being promoted by ODPM when the T-Gov strategy implies large scale, aggregated, silo-based delivery of services, without addressing how services can be joined-up in ways that make sense to the citizen.
7. Shared services: Is there any evidence that economies of scale and scope can be achieved by shared services? Such evidence as does exist suggests that any savings could be offset by lower quality services and disruption caused by changes.
8. Professionalisation of IT: Possible confusion between CIO and CTO roles. What is proposed and what support may be offered for each role. We need to map current work and good practice within local government and ensure that we avoid duplicating the good practice and programmes that exist currently, although we may want to assess their suitability as a platform for development across the wider public sector.
9. The strategy document does not offer any definition of the central concept of 'transformation'. It seems to assume that there is a generally accepted meaning which will be shared by readers of the strategy. Experience of recent discussions would suggest that this is not the case.

i) Support programme

10. A number of members and partners have begun to look at models for support programmes that may assist local authorities in understanding, interpreting and implementing the strategy. Elements that such a programme may include:
 - Definition of the role for a 'T-champion'. S/he will champion an entrepreneurial culture throughout the organisation
 - Develop challenge questions as a self assessment tool which may help to define drivers and enablers in the local and regional context
 - Review potential exemplar authorities to promote good/best practice

- Develop a transformation training suite. This will include a range of formal qualifications and CPD modules, awareness sessions, training courses, workshops, practitioner qualifications e.g. MSP
(We were nervous about the use of the term ‘toolkit’ as the proliferation of them in recent years has added an ambiguity to the term if not rendered it meaningless. It is more helpful to consider organisations receiving support and sharing knowledge by participation in a ‘dynamic network’ via a training suite that would actually be a convergence of communities of interest, knowledge sharing, events and workshops, professional development schemes etc.)
- Active Practitioner network – Contact database, brainstorming sessions, forums, web site etc
- Identification and mapping of assets and enablers at national, regional and local levels

ii) What could a transformed council look like?

11. There have been comments asking if it is possible to answer the question ‘what would a transformed council look like?’ This would help people to ‘envision’ what transformation could mean for them. It is clear that if we are taking the concept of local prioritisation seriously then no detailed definitive answer is possible but that it may be possible to give a generic, but clear ‘descriptive image’ of a transformed council that would point clearly in the direction of transformation and raise questions and challenges that any local council may ask of itself.

D. Next steps

As referred to in the introductory paragraphs we believe that there needs to be wide and real engagement with the local authority community at senior and practitioner levels in order to understand how the strategy can best assist them in achieving their aims and priorities, whilst at the same time perhaps challenging and changing that means by which they achieve them. Discussions have begun and are continuing among and within local government, its partners and stakeholders to establish something of a roadmap and corresponding resources for this transformational initiative. There is no shortage of interest and support for the strategy document and we would like to continue acting and engaging on behalf of our members to ensure that the overall strategic objectives as well as the interests and priorities of local government and the needs of citizens are met as this strategy becomes reality.