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Dear Sirs

### **Transformational Government – Enabled by Technology**

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the development of a new strategy to use information technologies to “transform the business of government”.

We have considerable experience of business transformation, both as an individual organisation and in partnership with others and very much welcome the aspiration to design public services around the needs of customers, to deliver efficiencies through sharing and to improve the management of technology-enabled change.

Recognising that this is a work in progress, we will not be commenting on a point by point basis to a strategy that has clearly been written for a largely central government audience. We are aware that a Local Government ‘translation’ is expected, which may address some of our concerns and questions. Until this is available, our comments are based on the published document and are of a general nature, around the following themes:

1. The role of Local Government
2. The role of partnerships
3. The programme ‘gap’
4. Underlying reform themes
5. Shared business vision
6. Timetable
7. Approach and Scope
8. Business Case
9. Building on lessons learned

### **The role of Local Government**

Local Government delivers a major part of public facing government services. Our active and sustained involvement in the design and delivery of services designed around the needs of citizens, businesses and communities will be a critical success factor for this strategy. However, although the strategy talks about the wider public sector, it speaks almost exclusively to a central government audience.

This is an opportunity missed. Local Authorities are coming to the end of a sustained, but significantly target- and deadline-driven five-year programme of technology-enabled change.

Frustrations with the more prescriptive elements of the past programme, and the drive to balance (on an individual authority basis) investment to date with predicted benefits, may predispose many authorities to wind down e-Government programmes as a 'job done', rather than treat the achievements as the foundation on which invest further time and effort for greater, long term rewards. The practical effect is a reduction in the potential pool of prospective partners, which is a real issue for all authorities that wish to prepare for and seek opportunities for early and sustained collaboration.

It is recognised that alignment between this strategy and other proposed changes to the organisation and delivery of local services may be difficult. However there are a number of underlying, policy-independent actions to become better able to 'prepare to share' across organisational boundaries which should not be unnecessarily delayed.

### **The role of partnerships**

Local Authority e-Government and modernisation partnerships will have an important role in making early progress towards an agreed, common platform upon which all Local Authorities can engage with the wider public sector. It is recognised that a key risk to effective transformation is the absence of or late provision of IT advice to inform policy formulation. However, there is a real danger that existing partnerships may fragment or adopt diverse approaches to transformation at the very time when we need to be taking advantage of common, national opportunities.

It has been a very real effect of the focus on the individual delivery of the Priority and Transformation Outcomes and the imposition of fixed deadlines that authorities have had to abandon partnership approaches to issues that needed a partnership approach to deliver the greatest benefits. We now have a situation where individual authorities have made long term investments in expensive technologies.

What is needed now is a roadmap for migrating from authority-specific solutions to common, or connected, solutions. Local Authorities are unlikely to be able to make a benefits case for doing this, without reference to the opportunities from Transformational Government, or without some financial support for this work. Local partnerships will play a key role in the delivery of this connectivity. However, there is a danger that existing partnerships will

fragment in the absence of a clear role for them in the next 12 months, or will adopt very different regional approaches for issues that should be considered nationally.

### **The programme gap**

There is a year-long gap between the end of the Local e-Government Programme and the proposed start of the Transformational Government programme. This is a necessary pause for central government and large-scale national projects, which will use this time to make progress in preparedness for Transformational Government.

However, Local Government has made good, consistent progress and we wish to maintain momentum. We recognise the need for a co-ordinated, interim programme to identify progress, opportunities and constraints and to adopt some common standards to migrate towards. However, key elements of the supporting apparatus are being dismantled with little indication of what will replace them.

Of particular concern is the lack of a commissioning body for standards, the lack of support for the practical development of standards and for the management of standards. The current set of standards have been derived from different sources but do not have a clear ongoing 'home'. Nor is there support for the ongoing development of standards on which information and service sharing will need to be based. Local Authorities have plugged the development vacuum by working together under the auspices of the esd-Toolkit. However, this work is not financially supported by central government despite being key to the practical ability to share services and information with Local Government and other agencies. It seems inappropriate that Local Government picks up the cost of preparing to share, when the rewards are likely to be felt unequally.

It is recognised that a consistent pressure for improvement is a pre-requisite for effective and timely change. The programme gap is in danger of dissipating momentum and wasting opportunities. Local Authorities are keen to engage with national government services to improve services to citizens and businesses. We understand that these two issues are recognised and that a road map for Local Government is proposed and would welcome the opportunity to contribute to this.

### **Underlying Reform Themes**

Although not explicitly stated in the consultation document, the report of the Strategy Project Team points to a foundation of reform principles:

- National standards to ensure that people have the right to high quality, services wherever they live.
- Devolution to give local leaders the means to deliver these standards to local people.
- More flexibility in service provision in light of people's rising expectations;

- Greater customer choice.

These are important themes, suggesting a fundamental shift in the purpose, design and culture of public services, with a greater emphasis on local service delivery, designed around and responsive to the needs of customers.

Understanding and recognising this foundation puts the three core themes within the strategy into perspective, based on a clear business vision. It also allows for some discussion about the future direction for the funding of some services, based on where and from whom customers choose to access services, thus genuinely providing a driver for a professional approach service design.

### **Shared business vision**

Unlike the Local e-Government Programme, which was firmly linked to the central local partnership shared public service delivery priorities, this strategy does not appear to currently offer the same opportunity for service buy in.

What is needed is either a recognition that a shared vision needs to be agreed, or to reaffirm the relevance of the pre-existing shared priorities. Or to more clearly state that this strategy is about connecting customer focus and efficiency, and it is up to each organisation to work out whether there are other priorities and how to meet them.

Does this business vision allow for the possibility that future funding decisions may not only reflect an assumption that “public service organisations only deliver good value for money when they standardise and share services with others” but also to create the basis for an environment where some funding for services “follows the customer”?

As it stands, the strategy reads as a vision for “doing IT better”, rather than pointing to tangible service improvement outcomes.

### **Timetable**

The overall timetable for this Strategy probably consists of a number of related timetables for potential participants. Early work to identify realistic timescales and shared milestones would be welcome.

We also welcome the concept of 2011 being the point at which momentum has developed, rather than being linked to a broad series of specific targets (although we recognise that these are likely come). We are reading the Strategy as a ‘prepare to share’ strategy, with some participants making early progress towards shared services and truly customer centric service design. Therefore 2011 appears to effectively be a major milestone in a broader, longer-term journey towards a transformed public service delivery model.

Timetables have been a thorny issue for improvement and transformation in partnership. Work on the Local e-Government Programme identified the need to develop a ‘windows of opportunity map’ upon which to orientate change. Key constraints have been existing contract timetables, the effect of earlier

decisions and investment that an improvement project may wish to alter and the diversity of opportunities landscapes for each partner. Making the optimum decision within an authority (for example, delivering good value for money from long term contracts) has the unintended effect of closing down or reducing opportunities to leverage efficiencies or service improvements in partnership. Without a clear timetable of milestones, it will be difficult to argue for less than optimal short-term solutions in order to preserve the agility to respond to new opportunities.

### **Approach and Scope**

The scope of the strategy appears to encompass the wider public sector, which we welcome. To deliver truly citizen centric services, it will be necessary to think beyond organisation, sector and regional boundaries. However, it is unfortunate that the content of the strategy does not place more equal emphasis on the local rather than central government challenge. However, we understand that a Local Government road map is in development and look forward to its publication. However, this is not widely known and there is a danger that a significant number of local authorities will not fully recognise the opportunities for transformation in partnership.

We would welcome the development of a joint strategy, setting out the parallel actions for local and central government and identifying key touch points. We feel that this would more openly set out the joint nature of this transformation and set the tone for the future.

The role of Local Government in the current document appears to be involved but peripheral. This is reinforced in the structures for managing Transformational Government, with limited involvement from Local Government. There are only 3 members on the CIO Council and 3 on the Service Transformation Board, representing 388 authorities and all of our customers. For a genuine shift towards citizen- or business-centric services and a shared service environment, the central/local partnership needs to be better reflected in the governance and advisory structures. We hope that a number of the proposed Customer Service Directors are drawn from non - Whitehall roles, to better represent the diversity of customer service experiences.

### **Business Case**

This document represents the vision for transformed government and is yet unsupported by a clear business case. Whilst we support the belief that this is the right direction and that efficiency and service improvement benefits will be realised from this work, the absence of an outline business case will need to be addressed very soon.

We have some experience of developing a working model for the calculation of efficiencies from achieving channel shift and are developing a suite of standardised operating policies for our services. We would welcome the opportunity to align this work with the opportunities to deliver improved,

consolidated access to government services for our communities, businesses and customers.

### **Building on lessons learned**

There are a number of lessons learned from the most recent multi-organisation, national modernisation, which we would like to see reflected in the practical detail of the next programme:

- The Local e-Government programme focused on service improvements in single organisations, with artificial deadlines and delivery targets making it difficult for authorities to collaborate effectively towards shared goals. We would like to see a suite of optional milestones to integrate with local and partnership plans, within a broad timetable and supported by appropriate funding.
- Although there were some frustrations with the prescriptive nature of some elements of the past programme, it was at least a common programme for all 388 authorities. We would like to see the facilitation of a Local Authority roadmap, developed and endorsed by authorities as the common improvement programme for Local Government.
- There has been a tension between the Audit Commission's and ODPM's measurement of improvement progress. Value for Money must be at the heart of assessments of our improvement, but with an allowance for the degree to which our actions are limited by an overarching requirement to work towards a shared environment. Concentration on short term and local optima will reduce the capacity of authorities to engage appropriately with the vision for the future.
- Project and Programme Management capacity now needs to be supplemented with a more professional and sustained approach to Business Change Management and Benefits Realisation. These are not project or programme activities, but integral to the management of services.
- An uncoordinated approach to technology-enabled change has both confused and delighted suppliers, and driven up costs. We suggest that there is an urgent requirement to upskill the Centres of Excellence to be able to support a new approach to technology enabled change, from sharing good existing practice, matching potential partners, supporting new approaches to contract flexibility and agility and co-ordinating a national picture of Local Government technology and change management spend. For this to be effective, we need a common categorisation to describe contractual arrangements, technologies and the services they are supporting.
- Deal with the issues that can only be resolved nationally. It has been very frustrating to identify constraints that need a nationally agreed approach only to have the responsibility pushed back to a local level that has neither the capacity nor authority to resolve them. The need

for a single business identifier to support improved services to businesses, national authentication standards, a national citizen database and common approach to public service smartcards are just a few of the issues that have been duly costly to attempt to resolve on a local basis. Those that have found solutions have had to adopt local compromises that may frustrate attempts to join up in the future, or have made unnecessarily high investments in less than optimal solutions.

We trust that you will accept these comments in the spirit in which they are offered. We are passionately supportive of the move to improve the customer experience of government and public service, the drive to deliver better value from the tax payers pound and to find opportunities to convert our effort into wider, beneficial policy outcomes.

Yours faithfully

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