

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Transformational Government Event

Wednesday 10th January 2007

KEYNOTE SPEECH

[Introduction]

Good morning.

I should probably start by saying that I always think the 'transformational' label is a slightly daunting one – looking at its name, this is one Government strategy where nobody can accuse us of setting the bar too low.

Instead it's what in "Yes Minister" speak might be called 'ambitious' or 'brave'.

So what do we mean by the term "Transformational Government"?

By this we mean how to reform public services to make them geared more to the way people live their lives and less based on traditional departmental boundaries, using ICT to do so.

It is important to start with this definition because it is important to be clear that in this area, ICT is not an end in itself, but is instead a vehicle for improving services to the public.

And this whole strategy should be seen in the context of the government's wider direction of travel on public services.

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In a world where people are more empowered by technology in their own lives, where they are getting more choice and empowerment over health treatment, over how benefits are paid and over other areas of public service it is important that we have an overview of how to change public services to make them more convenient and easier to use for the public.

It has been a real privilege since last May to be the Minister with responsibility for this area of Government work because I believe strongly in extending to as many people as possible the kinds of choices, chances and empowerment that perhaps in the past has only been enjoyed by a minority. ICT, properly used, is a powerful weapon in helping us do that.

And so I am pleased to be here with you today, marking the first annual report on our Transformational Government Strategy.

The report sets out both how the government spends its ICT budget and the strategies we are putting in place to manage that expenditure to improve public services.

This morning I want to say something about three key elements of our strategy:

- The delivery of citizen-centred services;
- The shared services agenda;
- And greater professionalism in the government IT service.

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Citizen-centred services

First of all, citizen-centred services.

As I said, this strategy is about using ICT to make people's interactions with government more efficient and easier for the public. Importantly, it is also about trying to ensure that more disadvantaged groups or those without means and wealth do not miss out on the potential offered by reform of public services and better use of ICT. So, in the report we set out just some of the ways in which ICT is being used to gear services more towards the public.

For example, the Pensions Service has now reformed the way it works so that pensioners can apply for both state pension and pension credit on one 20 minute phone call compared in the past to extensive form filling. The result has been an improved service carried out with fewer people and the improvements are a great credit to the staff who work in the pensions service.

Around 4 million motorists have renewed their car tax online, at a time of their own choosing, because we created the capacity for this to be done through the DirectGov website. I will mention websites in more detail later on.

These changes are taking place in other areas too. The point is to make it easier for the public to carry out the business they need to do with government in a way that is more convenient for them.

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Shared services

It has been said for decades that Government needs to join up more. I have worked in politics for many years and I know that is easier said than done but the transformational government agenda does offer a real opportunity both to join up services at the front line and to work together more on government back office functions.

Today we publish a set of plans for how different sectors of government will go about working together more effectively. There is still a lot more work to do but we can see that the goal is worth it. For example in health, 108 trusts have joined up their finance services to save £220 million over ten years and over the same period in Defence the joint People, Pay and Pensions Agency should deliver £300million. Again the drive is to secure the maximum value for money for the public, to devote resources to the front line, and to use the possibilities offered by ICT to drive forward efficiency.

Professionalism

I also want to say a word about professionalism in the Government IT service. More than 7,000 people have joined the Government IT profession since it was launched in July 2005. Theirs is a challenging and complex job and it is incumbent on us to ensure they are professionally lead and managed.

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Highly experienced top flight staff from both public and private sector backgrounds are now working together through a network of Chief Information Officers helping to manage complex projects involving sometimes millions of transactions every week.

And we have delivered the early stages of a new Government IT Academy to teach the special skills required in public sector IT projects.

But we also know we have to do more. So we are now laying the foundations for modern portfolio management to take a deeper overview of the government's technology investment programme.

Websites

The Prime Minister said in his speech to party conference a few months ago that the Google Generation, empowered by technology, has a completely different set of expectations about services compared to previous generations.

Government responded to the growth of the internet with a proliferation of websites offering a wide range of information and services. Now, some years in to the internet revolution we have undertaken a strategic review of government websites, based firmly on the way that people use and access information.

The aim is to give people the information and the services they need in line with how people access information and to do so in a

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way that maximises value for money and resists unnecessary duplication.

The aim is to concentrate most content either on the DirectGov website or the Business Link website. We will have a very small number of other tailored sites but the picture in future will be far fewer sites than at present.

This review across government has examined over 900 government sites so far and I can announce today that we have already earmarked 551 for closure as the information they contain can be made more accessible through Directgov or a small number of other key sites.

We will review the remaining sites during the course of this year.

I want to stress that the information and services people need will still be there but concentrated on fewer websites provided by government.

The Democratic Conversation

We will continue to do everything we can to improve transactions, improve services and improve the provision of information through ICT.

But the question is also whether we can go beyond these areas to deepen and broaden the democratic dialogue between government and the public.

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The key feature of these technologies is the extent to which they empower people. What can government learn from the increased power and control these technologies give people and from the capacity for a richer two way conversation between government and the public which they may offer?

Let me pause for a moment on the recent e-petitions initiative on the Number 10 website – which have recently been in the news.

The Downing Street team decided to open up their website to the public to allow them to post petitions of their own choice on the site.

Within some rules about staying within the law and the civil service code people can submit petitions on issues of their choice.

In the first month, 2000 petitions were submitted, over 200,000 signatures posted with a pattern of around 50 petitions per day being posted after the initial spike.

But the exercise is also significant in terms of how it has been done.

The Downing Street team worked with MySociety who have a track record in designing easy to use democratic websites. Together they implemented not just the initial idea but did so with a new way of designing a Government project, with open-ness in the

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development process, and inviting people to help design the system as well as posting petitions.

As a result of this approach, a number of suggestions from the public about *how* this exercise should be done, as well as of course on the content of the petitions, have been implemented since the launch.

Now of course there are risks here and people can pick up on petitions which disagree with government policy but giving voice to those who disagree with you as well as those who do agree with you is inherent in any opening up of dialogue in this way.

Conclusion

Transformational Government is a long-term endeavour. Today's Report shows that we have made a good start on the improvement strategy for improving public services through technology – and that there have been many more successes than there have difficulties – even when the latter get more coverage. It may be 'ambitious' and 'brave' but it is starting to pay off and furthermore it is hugely important in our efforts to meet the way people actually live their lives. Let me end by thanking all of you here who have already made an important contribution to this process - and by wishing you well for the rest of today's discussion. I hope that we will work together in the future to take this progress further still.

ENDS