

Change

In an exclusive for Government IT, Ian Watmore reveals the detailed brief of his role as head of the e-government unit

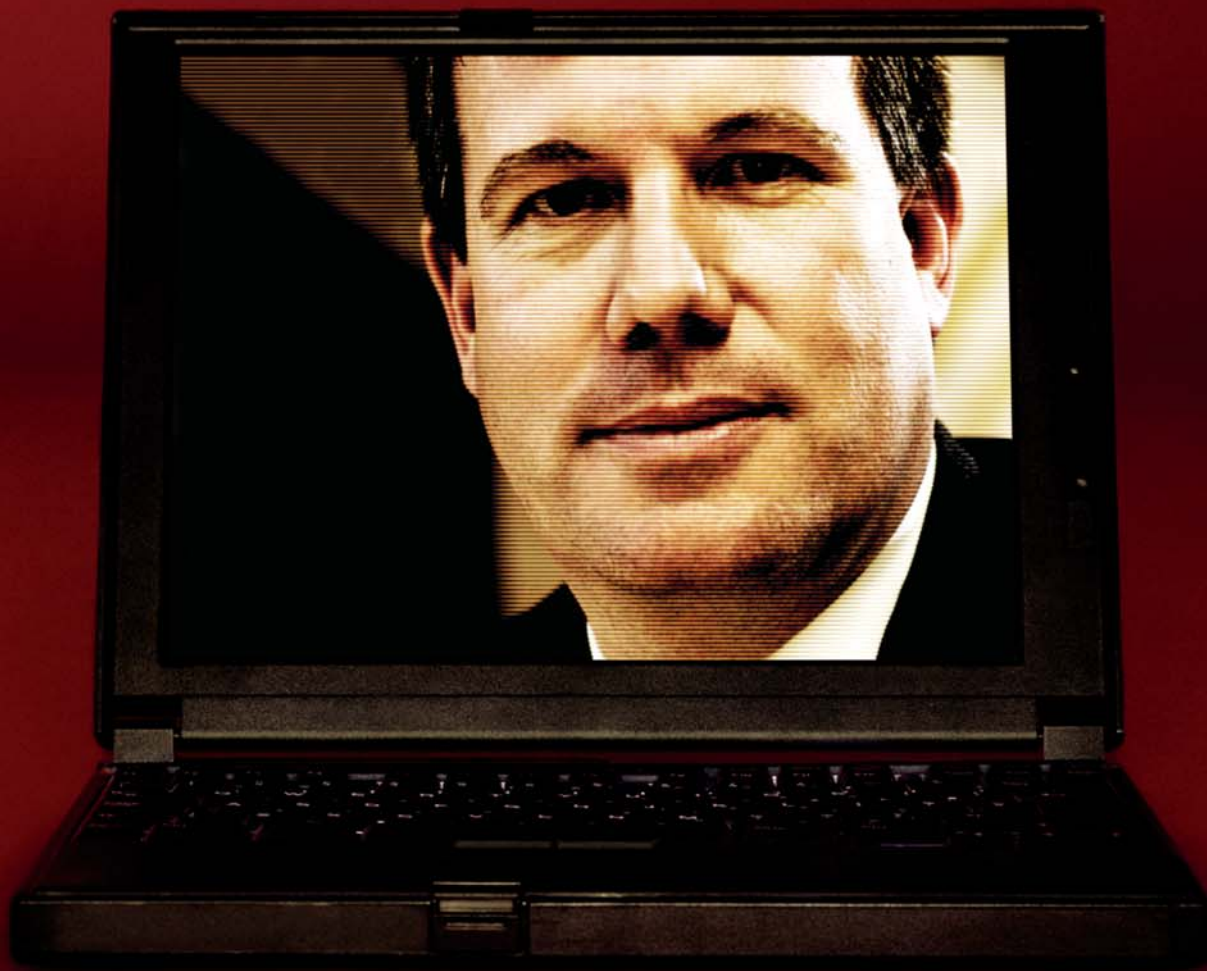
The Prime Minister has set Information Technology (IT) professionals in Government the mission of "ensuring that IT supports the business transformation of Government itself so that we can provide better, more efficient, public services".

The Prime Minister has also said that, "it is only by truly transferring power to the public through choice, through personalising services, through enhanced accountability, that we can create the drivers for continuous improvement in our services. The aim is radical reform, re-designing public services around the individual,

to give people the services that they today expect – services that are prompt, convenient, responsive and of the highest quality". IT is absolutely fundamental to delivering this at scale.

My role has been established to help achieve that mission. It is a new role, analogous to that of a group Chief Information Officer (CIO) that you might find in a large corporation.

It is very different from the old e-envoy role. Andrew Pinder managed a social programme to get the UK as a whole online, as well as getting Government to make its services available to citizens online, a role he completed with great



agent

success. Within what is now a thriving e-commerce economy, my focus is purely on Government as a service provider – and not just those services provided online to citizens but all IT-enabled services.

In particular, I am looking at:

Online services by which citizens transact business with Government over the Internet. We are in a good position today since the great majority of Government services are now available online.

New technologies that are becoming ubiquitous in our every day work and home lives. Such technologies include mobile phones and other wireless devices, interactive digital TV, smart cards and digital pens, 3G networks, satellite and radio frequency (RF) technologies.

Transaction processing systems, which ensure the effective delivery of front-line public services. These include the systems for collecting national and local taxes, paying pensions and welfare benefits, licensing vehicles, distributing passports and drivers' licences, supporting border and homeland security, controlling defence logistics and maintaining patient records.

Corporate systems, which support Government bodies themselves. These include HR systems managing those who work within the public sector, financial systems which control and monitor Government spending and office systems enabling public sector workers to communicate in normal times and in crisis and emergency situations.

To ensure that IT properly supports the Prime Minister's transformation agenda, I have identified the following five areas to prioritise our efforts.

Stimulating joined-up, business-led IT strategies and policies

Each Government agency has a responsibility to develop business-led IT strategies or roadmaps for its area of Government business. My job in part is to help create these, but also to ensure that they are "joined up" with other services – in effect to create an IT roadmap across Government as a whole. In doing this, we will inevitably surface omissions, overlaps and conflicts which need resolution. For example, individual programmes may be sensible on

their own, but duplicate areas of work, or create capacity conflicts in critical skills. Also, the joined-up view of IT may highlight policy issues, which affect the whole of Government (for example, the legality of digital signatures, or the role of open source software), and it will be my responsibility to identify and help to resolve these.

In doing this work, we will mainly be focusing upon the legislative, service reform and efficiency drives of Government. But, like any big business, we also have the challenge of our legacy systems. Many of these systems were built in the '80s and early '90s – and continue to function well today. But the question always needs to be addressed – do we continue to build on these, or do we replace them? When we build upon them, integration architectures should be shareable across Government agencies. But there will come a point at which legacy replacement becomes essential and strategies for their replacement in the most cost-effective and least disruptive manner will need to be developed.

Supporting the transformation of public services

IT can greatly support the quality or effectiveness with which the Government serves its citizens and achieves its policy outcomes.

Citizen centred

Better public services demand that the citizen be put at the centre of affairs – and that the services they receive are citizen-centred, rather than provider-centred. [I am using the word "citizen" here to encompass people as individuals, in families, in groups, or as representatives of their workplaces. And, of course, there are certain "services" that the citizen might not prefer to receive, especially in the law enforcement area!]

Citizen-centred Government is hard because the structure of Government is not naturally organised by citizen. And changing that is impractical – imagine having to re-organise the streets of London to be like the grid system of some US cities just because it would be easier to find one's way around. It cannot be done, so we have to seek other solutions.

IT can help by delivering services from multiple providers to groups of citizens, like motorists or parents, in a joined-up way. The aim is to present one joined-up Government service to a citizen regardless of which agencies are involved behind the scenes.

The Government's flagship digital service Directgov, which is available on the web and Digital TV, makes a first step in this direction. To continue the analogy, Directgov presents an easily navigable landscape, while the underlying reality is one of twisty and narrow streets. By continuing to work with other Government agencies, it is our intention to extend and deepen this service over the coming months and years.

Identification and authentication

One consequence of citizen-centred Government is the need to identify citizens to the various providers of service in a simple, repeatable and reliable way. The joining up of services requires a Government-wide approach to the subject of identification and authentication. For example, to realise the benefits, should we replace the many identification numbers that exist across Government with one (or at least a smaller set), which people can use whether seeing their doctor, paying their taxes, receiving their pension, driving their car, or visiting the public library?

This issue is complex from a practical point of view as the details are very important as to how and when an identifier is used, and the natural timeframe for change is long – passports, for example, are only renewed every ten years and driving licences can be renewed even less frequently.

But the issue is also complex from a privacy point of view. As identifiers converge, citizens have simplified access to Government services, but concerns over privacy get increased.

So finding a convergent approach to identifiers requires delicate judgements to be made. The boundary of acceptability is likely to move over time, and there are no easy answers. But we must not duck the issue just because it is tricky – the pace of reform requires strategic clarity in this pivotal area.

> POWERHOUSE

Self service

For many services it is better for citizens to serve themselves without intervention by public servants. Already the greater proportion of such Government services are available online. But making services available online does not automatically mean that they are used in volume. So the focus of the next few years will be about take-up and quality, particularly of services that really touch people's lives.

For example, online filing of tax returns has now reached a critical mass of one million returns each year. This is a significant milestone and shows what can be done as we push on so that the great majority of returns are filed this way. Elsewhere, our challenge is to achieve critical mass and then drive take-up so that other channels can be significantly wound down and eventually closed altogether.

Intermediaries

Sometimes the transaction with Government may best be conducted online by an 'intermediary' or an agent of the citizen. IT can greatly enhance the ability of the intermediary to act on a citizen's behalf.

Such intermediaries may be in the voluntary sector, such as Citizen's Advice Bureau staff, or in the private sector – accountants acting on behalf of self-assessed taxpayers, or insurance companies on behalf of the motorist. They may be in the public sector – for example, using new online systems, GPs can help patients in the surgery select a consultant and book an appointment there and then. Also friends, carers and family members may act on behalf of pensioners and other citizens unable to go online themselves.

Front-line services

Although the drive to put services online must continue, many services will still require a direct transaction between the citizen and a front-line public servant. Technology is not about replacing these, but rather enhancing their effectiveness by giving these public servants better tools to do their job.

One example here is the National Programme for IT (NPIIT) in the NHS. When implemented, this programme will greatly enhance the

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healthcare professionals' ability to meet patients' needs. They will be able to make clinical decisions based upon an integrated and current patient medical record, and the automation of routine tasks will free up clinicians to treat more patients.

Enabling efficient public services

IT will be key to delivering the recent Efficiency Review conducted by Sir Peter Gershon. The

public spending round just completed has backed major efficiencies into Departmental spending plans. This brings the same cost pressures to the public sector that have driven the private sector to use technology to reduce costs.

As the Chancellor said in his Budget speech, 'It is because the public sector has invested £6 billion in new technology, modernising our ability to provide back-office and transactional services, that I can announce a gross reduction in civil service posts of 84,150, in order to release resources from administration to invest in the front line.'

Effective = efficient

The experience of the private sector is that good customer-centric processes are not only effective, but efficient also. In Government, we would expect to drive out efficiencies as we help public servants do their jobs better, citizens to serve themselves and intermediaries and agents to transact on behalf of citizens. In other words, better public services are also more efficient.

Corporate services

Behind the scenes, however, there is also much scope for using IT to increase efficiency, for example in HR and finance. Here, the software platform choices are pivotal – both in terms of the commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) packages chosen and the way they are configured and implemented.

Best practice in these areas suggests that it is better to customise processes to fit those in the package, rather than the other way around. This approach will serve to inform the process owners about what is practical versus desirable, will help the whole of Government to move in consistent directions and learn from each other, and potentially help move to shared or outsourced services in due course.

Achieving IT efficiencies

There is also scope to deliver efficiencies in IT itself, for example, through: benchmarks for desktop office systems to achieve consistent and cost-effective infrastructure; further Government-wide economies of scale, which can be achieved through bulk purchasing; best

practice, drawing lessons from the CIOs who are achieving greatest efficiency in their IT functions; and presenting a Government-wide view to suppliers in both collaborative and competitive settings.

And as the pace of change in Government gathers, so it is more important to use the latest technology to help Ministers and officials alike, to enable them to be more effective and efficient in their front-line roles. Examples

include tools to improve Government-wide knowledge management and secure mobile and remote working. My role is to be the IT change agent across Government which unlocks these efficiencies.

Sponsoring a cost-effective approach to IT security

Technology greatly facilitates open and accessible Government, but it also opens new avenues for

radical reform, re-designing public services around the individual, give people the services that they today expect

breaches of security and invasions of privacy.

At the most sensitive end, the British Government is already world-leading in its high-end security systems and this must continue.

However, the mass of information that is held and processed electronically by the IT estate of Government needs to be both secure and easily accessible, a tricky balance to strike. Striking that balance is a Government-wide issue since the system is only as secure as its weakest point, yet the tools and techniques for achieving security can often run counter to ease of use by citizens and public servants alike. My role is to find an appropriate balance between cost-effective security and usability, to encourage usage in a climate of confidence.

Capability to succeed

There are many successes in IT-enabled business change within Government, often unsung and unnoticed. But there have also been notable problems that have received much scrutiny and public attention. The problems that occur are understandable because of the scale of the systems, the complexity of the business, and the special challenges of the public sector. They may be understandable, but we must strive to make them avoidable as far as we can.

Government has worked successfully in recent years to implement the Gateway review process for mission critical projects. Gateway is universally highly regarded, and it improves each year as more lessons are learned. But a good review process is only one part of the answer.

Capability and capacity

The reform agenda is a huge challenge and to

deliver it we need a team of IT professionals across Government with the capability and capacity to deliver all the reforms based upon IT. In particular we need a common career framework for IT professionals, with an integrated approach to training and community, and utilisation of a proactive, cross-agency deployment to build work experience, and knowledge sharing – via best practices and through personal networks – involving politicians, business change

execute and take a Government-wide view, while maintaining accountability for specific operations and programmes in their area. This is to break down the silo barriers, which can exist across Government, facilitate and encourage learning from each other and to make individuals feel comfortable in asking for help or giving advice.

I will also be appointing an experienced IT professional team to help the CIO Council create a career framework, training, best practices and

open dialogue with Ministers, MPs, the media and industry watchers, private sector CIOs, international Government CIOs and through all these channels, citizens themselves. This will not only help better results on the ground, it will increase confidence in our collective ability to deliver change, which can only be good for the reform agenda overall.

To conclude, when I applied for the role, the job advertisement described it as the most



leaders and suppliers in two-way exchanges with the IT professionals.

We also have to know who the most experienced professionals are in this field, and deploy them to where the needs of Government are greatest, regardless of organisational boundaries. In the short term, while we put in place the longer term programmes to grow capability organically, we will have to recruit experienced professionals to deploy on our biggest projects since the pace of reform is increasing, rather than slowing down.

CIO Council

At the centre, we will be creating small but senior central teams with real expertise in the key areas, which matter. But to get real improvements in capability and capacity, we must work in partnership right across Government, first and foremost with the IT professionals of Government, but also with the business officials and Ministers who are leading the public service reforms which IT underpins.

To achieve this partnership, we will be establishing a Government-wide CIO Council – whose membership will come from the wider public sector, not just central Government. The purpose of the CIO Council will be to create and deliver a Government-wide agenda to support the transformation of Government and to build capability and capacity in IT-enabled business change.

In chairing the CIO Council, my approach will be to facilitate the Council members to function as a self-empowered team, a team in which individual members develop a common agenda which they personally believe in, and which they take back to their own agencies to

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sense of community for all IT professionals, wherever they work in the public sector.

Supplier partnerships

Much of Government's IT-enabled change will be delivered by the IT marketplace, and so the IT supplier community represent an important part of our delivery capability. The formal relationships with suppliers will continue to be managed by the Office of Government Commerce and individual agencies. However, I will be meeting with suppliers to add another dimension to the relationship, in particular: presenting a single face to suppliers on Government-wide plans; hosting and attending Government-wide supplier IT Forum(s); encouraging the structured input of supplier ideas and innovations; promoting a "balance sheet strength combined with innovation" marketplace; developing partnership arrangements to enhance capability and capacity; and troubleshooting key problem areas.

Learning and sharing

Overall, the challenge of delivering IT enabled Government reform is so huge that boundaries will be pushed technologically and in terms of best practice. As the Government CIO, I want to encourage an environment of learning and sharing in the widest sense. We have much to learn from others and much best practice to share. So I will be encouraging regular and

influential role in UK IT, and there are no bigger business challenges than that of transforming the public services. I am very excited by the challenge and hope that when I leave the role, I will be able to look back and say:

"My successor has a clear strategic roadmap and policy framework laid down for the next cycle of IT enabled reform.

"There has been real progress in the reform of public services underpinned by IT in the eyes of citizens and taxpayers.

"IT has greatly assisted the achievement of the Efficiency Review objectives of 2004.

"Public servants increasingly believe they have good IT tools to help them execute their roles.

"There is an appropriate balance between security and privacy and openness and ease of access for services supported by IT.

"The capability and capacity to handle the most complex mission critical projects now exists in Government – so that there is external and internal confidence to press ahead with more reform.

"There is a strong team ethic within the extended IT community across Government and a sense of career, competence and achievement within IT professionals.

"UK Government has achieved a strong competitive and collaborative relationship with IT suppliers both large and small.

"The UK is among the leading countries for effective and efficient IT enabled Government, and public services have kept pace with UK citizens' experience of commerce".

Apart from that the job is easy... <

Ian Watmore

Head of the e-Government Unit

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