

Strand B Paper 4/2007

Joint Secretariat Progress Paper

December 2008

1 Common ICT Infrastructure

1.1 Network Infrastructure

NIRAN (Northern Ireland Regional Area Networking) are to provide cost estimates for network infrastructure for potential pilot Councils through IT Officers Group. NIRAN are responsible for the NI use of the JANET high speed internet network used in further and higher education across the UK.

DoE officials have had discussions recently with Welsh Assembly officials which revealed that a contract for network services for all of Wales had been let recently and was opened to the wider public service. Follow up discussions to seek further details and potential access to the contract, are to be arranged shortly.

1.2 Microsoft Unified Communications

Discussions with Microsoft have begun on the potential for the Microsoft Unified Communications application to be used in Local Government. This could revolutionise communications around Councils enabling integrated information sharing, collaborative working, video conferencing, instant messaging and VOIP telephones, as well as e-mail services. It would be particularly useful in the period when new Councils and relationships will have to be established. Microsoft are proposing a deal for local government as potential early adopters and would also assist in defining the underlying network requirements. **It is proposed that we organise an event in January 2008 to demonstrate the system to Chief Executives, members and those responsible of IT and communications in Local Government.**

1.3 Local Authority Customer Relationship Management (LA CRM)

The Customer Relationship Management event held with Antrim and Belfast Councils was very useful and very well received. This was the first Modernisation Seminar and was held on 30th November at Antrim Borough Council Headquarters. Antrim members and officials gave an excellent account of their impressive and ongoing customer service journey. They already use the LA CRM system (supplied by Belfast City Council). As a result of the event 5-6 other Councils are now actively pursuing further meetings with Antrim and Belfast and considering the low cost deal negotiated by DoE with Belfast. **DoE intend to continue the monitoring and development of this programme on behalf of the Sub-Group and will report on developments.** Both Antrim and Belfast Council staff are happy to present information to any Council on request.

1.4 Further Customer Service Event with APSE

The second Modernisation seminar has been organised with APSE on *“Concentrating on Customer Services – Implications for councils, councillors and customers”*. This is scheduled for 13 December 2007 at the Ramada Hotel, Belfast. It is a morning event only with registration at 09.15 with the seminar ending at 13.15 with lunch. Speakers are coming from East Riding of Yorkshire Council, Armagh City and District Council, Kettering Borough Council, the General Consumer Council NI and Nottingham City Council to share their experiences.

2 Procurement

2.1 Procurement Professionals

As part of the continuing review of procurement arrangements on behalf of the Sub-Group, a useful and constructive meeting with Local Government procurement professionals took place in November. Work is progressing on gathering information on procedures with a view to devising an integrated procedural approach and on examining any legal issues relating to collaborative procurement. We are also exploring the priority of potential spend areas which could benefit from collaborative procurement immediately or in the short-term. **It is proposed to move forward with a pilot collaborative procurement as soon as possible.** All procurement professionals had a very positive approach to these discussions and are participating in information gathering and provision.

2.2 E-Procurement

We had been exploring the potential pilot use of the First Derivatives e-procurement system in use with Newry and Mourne District Council, which has been highly successful for them, producing large savings and securing their local supplier base. Consilium, who provide finance systems for 21 out of 26 Councils, have an e-procurement module in their new Total Finance product and we will be exploring its usefulness, viability and cost, given the widespread application of Consilium systems in Local Government. We will report back to the Sub-Group on developments.

3 Finance, Payroll and Assets

Consilium, as mentioned above, provide finance systems widely in Local Government, as well as payroll and asset management systems. We will be exploring their current application, potential development (including shared services potential) and cost. Some Councils are about to adopt the new Consilium Total Finance product, including Castlereagh, who wish to work with us to help assessment of the new products on a pilot basis for other Councils. We will report back to the Sub-Group on developments.

4 NI Direct

A useful and constructive meeting was held with the Delivery and Innovation Division of DfP and a report of the meeting is attached. There is a commitment to NI Direct in the Programme for Government. It is proposed to introduce NI Direct in a phased way with an increase in the services covered by the civil service contact centre. This could lead to customer confusion in the interim –citizens would have a single number to telephone for some services but still have to ring multiple numbers to get through to other services. NI Housing Executive have the same concerns and a joint approach may be useful when we have further discussions with DID in the short term. Clear outcomes from the meeting were: (1) to decide on the services and information we would like to feature in NI Direct; and (2) gather that information and ready it for NI Direct use.

DID are prepared to fund any exercise that we need to undertake to gather and prepare information.

5 ERNACT/EU

At a meeting with Derry and Donegal Councils, ERNACT and representatives from Cantabria in Spain, we explored the possibilities of a joint funding bid relating to multi channel citizen access to Local Government services. ERNACT are compiling the bid and we hope to review progress shortly. We will advise the Sub-Group of progress.

At a related meeting, Fujitsu proposed the development of a North-West (web) Portal and were to come forward with proposals.

6 Donegal County Council

At the above meetings the Council expressed their willingness to willing to work with us and would be happy to facilitate visits to their Public Service Offices as required. The NILGA eGovernment Working Group have also had contacts with Donegal but had to postpone a visit to the Council in October.

7 Welsh and Scottish Assemblies

A joint meeting of officials in Cardiff recently was very useful. Officials from both jurisdictions are very willing to work with us, exchange information, arrange visits etc. They also remarked very positively on our strategic approach to modernisation. We will be arranging further discussions with Wales on network infrastructure (mentioned above) and on their extremely successful approach to customer insight and customer service.

8 Shared Services Consultancy Terms of Reference

There have been a number of imaginative suggestions emerging from the ongoing discussions about the transfer of functions and other issues. For

example the model of service delivery for planning has been under consideration and many of the respondents to the Emerging Findings paper have also suggested innovative ways of delivering services efficiently and effectively regardless of the number of councils decided upon. Obviously any changes to delivery structures would have an impact on producing a shared services strategy. **We would therefore recommend that it would be prudent to wait to see how things develop before commissioning any research on shared services.**

9 NILGA eGovernment Working Group Update

The draft terms of reference for an IS Strategy for Local Government were issued for consultation at the end of September. With responses from 13 councils plus the IT and Finance Officers group a drafting team has produced a revised terms of reference. This will be considered by the eGovernment Working Group at its meeting on 6th December with a view to issuing an invitation to tender to consultants in the New Year. At this meeting the Group will be visiting the Future@Work facility in Clare House. This is an exhibition area containing demonstrations of how new technology can have an impact on home and office environment.