

## To Arms and Technology

...the election battle cry rings out

For the first time technology has seriously entered the general election battle ground – from party political rhetoric to parties' use of social media, technology has a key part to play and opinions to sway.

Technology benefits are being promised to the excluded and the disenfranchised from one side intent on managing the unmanageable. On the other, the chattering classes are being courted with promised slashing of the ID card, ContactPoint and health plan for IT projects.

Another day, another electioneering promise. Either side charges the other with profligacy and misunderstanding of the technology whilst promising to use this panacea for all ills to deliver the efficiency savings that the public sector desperately needs to ride through this recession.

However, whoever wins the election will be in an unenviable position technology-wise. There is no money; but there is no let up in demand for service. Heroic attempts across the public sector to 'do more with less' have been foiled by culture and inertia and the easy 'low hanging fruit' has long since been picked.

The next step will be painful. Technology can ease that pain but while its understanding is tinged with party political electioneering the big picture will again be missed.

So far, no one is listening to the front line. And frontline ICT is stretched to breaking point, as Socitm's latest ICT Trends (page 5) attests.

Frontline ICT is overwhelmed with the demands, and battered from headcount and budget reductions. To add insult to injury it is also seen as just another service to be pruned and trimmed, not as a potential saviour to the problems facing public service delivery.

So why has technology never made it to the higher echelons? A jokey conversation at a recent press conference could be said to have concluded with agreement that councils' senior management and leadership were just 'too old' and of a different generation to grasp the importance of technology for transforming the organisation.

But that is not good enough. There isn't time to wait for this older generation to 'die out'. It is incumbent upon the technology sector to engage with the rest of the world. Instead of shaking their heads with a wry smile and saying, "Oh, they just don't get it", it is time to communicate the whys, the wherefores and, crucially, the evidence based business case for delivering technology driven change.

**Helen Olsen, Editor - [helen@infopub.co.uk](mailto:helen@infopub.co.uk)**

## Government and opposition race to free data

More than 2500 datasets from across government are now free for reuse by the public from a one-stop data shop, [data.gov.uk](http://data.gov.uk).

"Making public data available for re-use is about increasing accountability and transparency and letting people create new, innovative ways of using it. Government data should be a public resource," said inventor of the world wide web and key player in the release of this data, Sir Tim Berners-Lee.

"By releasing it, we can unlock new ideas for delivering public services, help communities and society work better, and let talented entrepreneurs and engineers create new businesses and services," he added.

However, mayor of London, Boris Johnson, beat the government to 'free data' sainthood by launching the London Datastore two weeks before the government's [data.gov.uk](http://data.gov.uk) launch party. Technically, the government data is available first, as Johnson made his announcement prior to a promised go-live date of 29 January.

Politics notwithstanding, the advent of free, reusable 'non-personal' government data under an 'open' licence is to be welcomed and applauded. Perhaps more so if postcode and Ordnance Survey data had been included in the offering.

Professor Nigel Shadbolt, one of the site's prime instigators, said that the launch "marked an important step forward" in the work prime minister, Gordon Brown, announced last December in 'Putting the Frontline First: Smarter Government'. The aim, he said, was for the release of public data to be "business as usual" across the public sector.

### Give Cabinet Office teeth

A single minister of state post, with a 'coherent, cross-government IT brief' ranging from IT security to digital inclusion to industry policy, should be created, finds a report from the Institute for Government think tank.

'Installing New Drivers', concludes that 'the centre' - the Cabinet Office and/or the Treasury - 'needs to do more' to drive public sector IT strategies. Throughout government, states the report, 'Ministers frequently do not pay sufficient attention to the IT dimension of policy announcements. Coupled with the overriding importance attached to individual ministers' initiatives, this can lead to the wheel being reinvented across government. IT is often seen as a political after-thought because it enters the decision-making process too far 'downstream', when plans and deadlines are already fairly definite.'

[www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk](http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk)

Applications showing the traffic flows and congestion on the motorway network and a 'postcode newspaper' are already in preview stage. Others in progress include applications showing school catchment and performance, house prices, local amenities and services, or access to local hospitals.

Over at City Hall, the new London Datastore will "unleash valuable facts and figures that been languishing for far too long in the deepest recesses of City Hall," said Johnson. "I firmly believe that access to information should not just be the preserve of institutions and a limited elite. Data belongs to the people, particularly that held by the public sector, and getting hold of it should not involve a complex routine of jumping through a series of ever decreasing hoops."

Both projects take much from the lead of president Obama's administration in the US with the esteemed Data.gov open public data site which, according to US chief information officer, Vivek Kundra, contains "more than 168,000 datasets online".

<http://data.gov.uk>  
[www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk)  
<http://data.london.gov.uk>

### Local spending reports online

Details of how councils and other agencies spend public money will be put online from the summer as part of a shake-up of local spending reports. Communities secretary, John Denham, said that the new-look reports will provide greater transparency, saving people from trawling through a series of reports and statistics on how their taxes are being put to use. Reports are to be published in "a clear and user friendly format", instead of in "a series of excel spreadsheets" as at present.

[www.places.communities.gov.uk](http://www.places.communities.gov.uk)

### PRIZE DRAWS

Thank you to all those that participated in the research stages of our latest reports and congratulations to the winners of the prize draws for each:

#### Connecting the Public Sector

- £50 Amazon Voucher - David Flintham, Group Manager, Customer & Information Services, Waltham Forest London Borough

#### eForms in a Digital Britain

- 3G 8GB iPod nano – Peter Kendrick, Head of Technology, Stafford Borough Council
- £50 Amazon Voucher – Karen Whalley, Principal Service Development Manager, Trafford Council

Prizes are on their way to the winners. For a copy of either report please email Helen Olsen: [helen@infopub.co.uk](mailto:helen@infopub.co.uk)

## Brown places Smarter Government onus on councils

The prime minister's adviser on data policy, Professor Nigel Shadbolt of Southampton University, has been given the task of opening up local government data for re-use under the 'smarter government' strategy.

'Putting the Frontline First: Smarter Government', published by Gordon Brown before Christmas, says that the government will 'encourage' local authorities to release local public data and make it free for re-use. Shadbolt will crack the whip by leading 'a local public data panel to ensure that data are linked effectively across local authorities, the Local Government Association, government departments and agencies'.

Local government features strongly in the strategy, drawn up by Liam Byrne, chief secretary to the Treasury. A decade after Labour's Modernising Government green paper, it revisits some long-held ambitions of e-government enthusiasts, including compulsory e-channels and joined up systems.

Most significantly, it announces that the birth and death components of the 'Tell us Once' service will be 'rolled out nationally in 2010'. Change of address will follow, the paper states. As for compulsion, 'During 2010, we will set out, service by service, how transactions with government will move online as rapidly as possible, starting with student loans, child benefit and Jobseeker's Allowance.' The strategy also announces a £30m investment in UK Online 'to support the development of the National Plan for Digital Participation to get more than one million people online in the next three years'.

[www.hmg.gov.uk/frontlinefirst.aspx](http://www.hmg.gov.uk/frontlinefirst.aspx)  
[www.number10.gov.uk/Page21633](http://www.number10.gov.uk/Page21633)

See pages 9 and 10

## Cameron hones his power-to-the-people message

The Conservatives kicked off the New Year by publishing the first chapter of their draft manifesto and announcing their plans for the future.

Government through the power of information looks set to figure strongly. However, observers with an interest in the IT agenda will be looking for far more detail than has currently been set out about how public bodies would supply their citizens with data under a Conservative government.

Conservative leader, David Cameron, promised "the most radical decentralisation of power this country has seen for generations". He attacked "Labour's bureaucracy, running everything from Whitehall, denying people control over their lives and undermining the professionals in our public services".

He also made specific reference to technology: "We will create incentives and use the best technology to encourage and enable people to come together, solve their problems together, make this society stronger together." Government, he said, "Will enter a new era of transparency".

See pages 9 and 10.

**Cabinet Office promises information Assurance:** A new paper, 'Protecting Information in Government', sets out Cabinet Office plans for a new national information assurance strategy, updating the original one published in 2003, then updated 2007. To be published later this year, it will take in the messages of the Data Handling Review (June 2008) post HMRC personal data loss fiasco as well as those of the 'smarter government' strategy, 'Frontline First', published in December 2009. [www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk)

## Government IT strategy

As LGITU went to press, government CIO, John Suffolk, finally published the new government ICT strategy, 'Smarter, cheaper, greener', with, as the title suggests, a focus on cutting the cost of public sector ICT.

Savings to the public purse of £3.2bn annually from 2013/14 are claimed through measures set out in the government's new ICT Strategy.

The strategy reveals a plan for a smarter, cheaper and greener public sector ICT infrastructure and builds on the Smarter Government programme which sets out a raft of ways in which the government intends to halve the public deficit by 2014 – including savings of £3.2bn of technology enabled savings.

Cabinet Office minister, Angela Smith, said, "We are committed to putting the public's needs first. That is why we are innovating and revolutionising our ICT systems to ensure that they are as effective and efficient as possible for those working in the public sector, and at the same time we are able to make huge savings."

Suffolk said that the strategy maps out the "fourteen strands of how we will fundamentally transform the use of public services using technology", at a price, he said that will be "substantially lower" than that which the public sector is being charged today.

Key measures include establishing G-cloud, a government cloud infrastructure hosting services accessible via the PSN, a secure shared network.

[www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/cio/ict.aspx](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/cio/ict.aspx)

**Shared services in South West:** Two district councils have agreed 'in principle' to join up at chief executive and management team levels. South Somerset and East Devon have confirmed they will develop a shared services strategy to look at options for a joint management team under a shared chief executive - who should be in post by April 2010.

**Mandate sharing services:** Political and cultural resistance is preventing local authorities from working together to meet inevitable budget cuts, finds a new report that recommends changes in legislation to mandate cost saving shared services. Consultants at Deloitte say that councils will not reduce costs and make significant savings by sharing back office functions without further government legislation. Their report, 'Stop, start, save. Shared service delivery in local government', recommends obligatory introduction of regional or multi-local authority shared services to remove the need to build political consensus and address cultural resistance to the concept. [www.deloitte.com](http://www.deloitte.com)

Daily News /  
Daily Headlines  
[www.UKauthorITy.com](http://www.UKauthorITy.com)

**Vehicle tracking from Masternaut Three X has helped councils and gritting contractors keep the ice and snow at bay on major roads.** With dwindling road salt supplies, the Masternaut system enabled managers to monitor gritters live on screen as well as record how much salt has been spread. The bird's eye view of operations provided by the system helped ensure efficient and economical grit spreading, without sending gritting managers out on treacherous roads.



## Legal halt for Easy Council plans

**B**arnet's new fast track planning system - whereby those wanting a faster decision could pay more to jump the queue - has been derailed over concerns as to the legality of the 'easy council' approach to this service.

The Tory council's Future Shape redesign of service delivery launched last year by then Barnet leader, Mike Freer, proposed a radical new approach to dealing with the inevitable cuts in public sector budgets. Dubbed 'easy council', basic services would be available for all but optional extras would be available for those willing to pay - a la Easy Jet business model.

Whilst widely acclaimed as pioneering - and championed by Tory leadership - Barnet has

run into problems with implementation. Just last month (December 2009) a high court judge stopped it from removing 24-hour live-in wardens at sheltered housing. A campaign by elderly residents had claimed the council was acting unlawfully in its plan to scrap wardens in order to save £400,000 a year - citing that existing tenancy agreements and duties under the disability discrimination act precluded this.

Current council leader, Lynne Hillan, is said to be determined to carry through Future Shape and is pushing for changes to the law to give councils more flexibility. Meanwhile Barnet is considering whether to appeal the judgement.

## Essex gambles on outcomes and a change in government

**E**ssex County Council has finally signed a headline grabbing £5.4bn transformation contract with IBM with a view to fulfilling its vision of 'providing the best quality of life in Britain for its residents'.

The contract, which begins with immediate effect, underpins the county's ambition to become a one-stop shop for public services across its area, commissioned by outcomes rather than inputs. IBM will apply the highly fashionable lessons learned from Service Canada's success in creating a single point of access to multiple tiers of government.

Unlike in previous large transformational government deals, IBM and the council are not setting up a distinct business venture through which to sell services. Rather, as 'strategic partner', the company will act as the council's axe-man, trimming back the cost of services.

For such an ambitious long-term programme, the immediate target is surprisingly prosaic: £300m worth of savings over two years from rationalising

procurement, property and back-office services.

The tools of transformation are familiar. Executives speak of sharing back office services and cutting the need for office space by making more use of flexible and mobile working. In the longer term, the plan is to cut transaction costs by driving more services through a web portal, which for the citizens of Essex will become the main point of contact for all three tiers of government.

**G**etting places other systems cannot: Rural communities and hard to reach areas which do not have access to next generation broadband will benefit from a share of £1bn of government investment, said business secretary, Lord Mandelson. The investment will upgrade the UK's digital infrastructure to bring super-fast broadband to 90% of the country, essential if the UK is to remain globally competitive as estimates suggest that private investment will reach only up to 70% of the population by 2017.

**W**olverhampton reaches £7.1m settlement with Axon: An aborted attempt to transform Wolverhampton City Council through a partnership with Axon Solutions has been buried with a £7.1m payment to the supplier. The deal was cancelled by an incoming Conservative administration last year because it could not afford the up-front cost. Since then, a dispute has rumbled on about payment for work carried out. Just before Christmas council leader, Neville Patten, said that the authority had approved a settlement of £7.1m for work on transformation "and we continue to build on that work". The changes carried out would help the council save up to £10.16m over 10 years, he said.

**M**assive fines for data breaches: New powers expected to come into force on 6 April could cost public sector organisations £500,000 for serious breaches of the Data Protection Act. Information commissioner, Christopher Graham, said, "Getting data protection right has never been more important than it is today... I will not hesitate to use these tough new sanctions for the most serious cases where organisations disregard the law."

[www.ico.gov.uk](http://www.ico.gov.uk)

**L**ondon boroughs share ICT: Lewisham and Bromley are collaborating on the purchase and supply of IT services issuing joint tenders for five year ICT contracts worth up to £26.5m. Tender one is for IT infrastructure and support services valued at £4.4m a year, tender two for voice and data support services to the tune of £800,000 per annum. The estimated annual value of the contracts for Bromley is £1.9m and for Lewisham is £3.4m. The move could also lead to sharing of exchequer services and a data centre - Bromley has also placed a notice for exchequer services and Lewisham one for provision of a data centre. Responses will be considered from contractors who 'tender for both tenders jointly and or separately'.

[www.ggpsystems.co.uk](http://www.ggpsystems.co.uk)

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