

## Now it's time for c-gov

The storms that savaged the country in November add a physical backdrop to the devastation that is Britain's finances.

Climbing out of recession, for the public sector – which must carry the burden of both savage budget cuts whilst picking up the pieces of a society in recession – will take much longer than the commercial world. Indeed, the bankers are already looking forward to Christmas and bonuses.

Right now, in the public sector, the talk is all about cuts. This is no longer e-gov, or t-gov. It is c-government – the government where cuts are king. But don't let the standards drop while you do it mind, or the wrath of the great British public, the media and your political masters will rain down on your heads.

Technology must have a part to play in maintaining service standards and scope whilst operating within reduced resource. After all, is that not what technology promised? Operational efficiency, the paper-less office, more with less?

Somewhere along the line there has been a breakdown in communication – indeed, if there ever was communication.

Technologists have promised, leaders have bought, and rarely is either side completely happy with the result.

Chief executives say that technology people 'don't speak my language'. And truly, there is a duty for IT to engage. But technology people – both inside and outside local government – are still not able to translate the bits and bytes, the widgets and the infrastructures, into plain English that imparts exactly 'what' the technology will 'do' for local government and, crucially, what cultural change is needed to fully deliver these benefits.

It has been notable over the years that Solace draws the chief executives, CIPFA the finance directors and Socitm the heads of IT. And never the three shall mix. Surely there is now a solid case for communication across all three as to how the vision can best be technically implemented within financial constraints – not just within councils but across entire frontline public services. And how culture can be moved forward, en masse, to being performance driven but value led with enthusiastic uptake of the enabling technologies.

Socitm has long urged its members to 'take their place at the top table'. So why has this never happened? To truly help the public sector through the most challenging time of its history, technologists must engage with chief executives and finance directors to outline how, why and where technology can effect change.

Helen Olsen, Editor

## Bonfire of bureaucracy

LGA is pointing its finger at central government bureaucracy for wasting public sector money.

Simply by relieving local government from the data burdens of performance indicators and central government reporting, at least £4.5bn could be slashed from the annual public sector bill – without affecting frontline services.

Nicely timed to come out just before the Pre-Budget Report 2009 on 9 December, the LGA has published, 'Delivering more for less: maximising value in the public sector'. The report includes examples of unnecessary activity, identified by councils through their experience of working with Whitehall, which is 'taking serious resources away from frontline resources'.

"Billions of pounds of taxpayers' money is being spent on needless bureaucracy. We need a bonfire of red tape so that taxpayers' money can be freed up to protect frontline services," said Margaret Eaton, LGA chair.

"We need to make sure there is no unnecessary bureaucracy and that the vast array of different bodies providing public services do not waste money by duplicating the work others already carry out."

Eaton said that the recession is forcing "everybody who spends taxpayers' money to think about how they can do more with less... Staying the same is not an option."

The report suggests that government make immediate savings of up to £4.5bn a year from removing unnecessary administration and red tape before implementing cuts affecting local services:

- £400m from removing the current performance and reporting data burden;
- £250m from halving costs of regulating local government from the centre, abolishing government offices and reallocating improvement funding to local government;
- £1.5bn from reducing departmental administration costs of seven departments with close links to local authorities by 20%;
- £1bn saving on departmental resource budgets through reducing unnecessary policy activity;
- £900m savings from giving councils greater spending flexibility;
- £430m from unnecessary spending by quangos on administration.

Over the last ten years the number of full time employees working in central government has increased by 21%. Communities and Local Government (CLG) has reported a 10% increase in permanent staff in financial year 2008/9. Quangos have also significantly increased their expenditure – by £24bn to £43bn in 2008.

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

## OS data to be set free

From as early as next April the public may have access to Ordnance Survey (OS) data about electoral and local authority boundaries, postcode areas and mid scale mapping for use in digital innovation and to support democratic accountability.

Prime minister, Gordon Brown, made the announcement in response to "the demands for better use and access to data held by government. In this new world, smarter government is not an option but a necessity."

Communities secretary, John Denham, added, "Any public service reforms must be open about what is going on so that those outside it can examine what is happening and to propose alternative ways of doing things if necessary... This can only happen if the necessary information and data about what is currently delivered is easily and readily available."

Minister for Digital Britain, Stephen Timms, who has responsibility for the 'Making Public Data Public' initiative, said that the announcement was "an important step in our public data strategy. About 80 percent of public sector data mentions a place. Making Ordnance Survey data more freely available will encourage more effective exploitation of public data by businesses, individuals and community organisations."

Making public data available also enables people to reuse it both commercially and in social initiatives – apart from generating an estimated billion pounds for the economy the move would open up new tools for citizen engagement and public information.

The move is seen as a victory for the Guardian's three-year Free Our Data campaign to persuade the government to "abandon copyright on essential national data, making it freely available to anyone, while keeping the crucial task of collecting that data in the hands of taxpayer-funded agencies".

### Putting people on the map:

Sir Stirling Moss and Alan Hinkes helped Ordnance Survey launch Locatorz, a new mobile phone-based locating service that



allows you to view a person's position to within 10 metres. It uses a mobile phone's GSM connection to transmit its position to the Locatorz server, which plots the information on an OS map and sends it to a secure internet page.

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

## WiFi first for Swindon residents

Swindon will be the first town to give all 186,000 residents free internet access when its £1m WiFi 'mesh' goes live next month.

Digital City UK, a partnership between the council and two private companies, will give every resident free standard wireless access to the internet. Investment in the 1,400 secure access point 'Signal' will be recouped by offering upgrades for faster access offering higher download speeds.

The project was launched today as a partnership between the borough council and two private companies which will recoup their investment by offering upgrades and faster access at a yet to be determined price. However, every Swindon resident will receive free wireless access to all but the highest bandwidth internet sites.

Anti-virus software, and popular services offered by Microsoft and Google will be available on the network. Plans include potential delivery of remote CCTV services and real-time information on home electricity usage and air quality monitoring.

The mesh can also potentially provide free internet telephone calls, opening up new telehealth and telemedicine possibilities for the council.

Rod Bluh, Swindon Borough Council leader, said: "This is a truly groundbreaking partnership which will have real benefits for everyone living in Swindon.

"Not only will residents in the borough be able to access the internet for free; the council and its partners will be able to use the technology to provide cutting edge services to the areas or individuals who need them.

"Digital City will also provide the council with a unique funding stream and it is our intention to use our expertise to help other local authorities follow our lead."

Rikki Hunt of project partner, Avidity, said: "This is a fantastic opportunity for the whole of Swindon creating total social inclusion through our free service and, while others talk, Swindon is delivering a Digital City which will benefit both the public and business communities."

## ICT could reduce carbon emissions by 25%

ICT-based technologies have the potential to reduce carbon emissions by 25% in the G20 countries, compared with 2006 baseline emissions, says IDC.

The analyst has been focusing on where ICT can bring 'immediate benefit in reducing carbon emissions'. It believes that significant reductions can be made across all the sectors it surveyed: energy generation and distribution, buildings, transport, and industry. Technologies highlighted include integrating renewable energy into energy distribution using smart grids, ICT-enabled smart building systems, ICT-optimised supply chains, and variable motor controls in industrial machinery.

IDC's study focused only on technologies that are 'currently mature enough to be implemented within three years (given investment and government approval); have significant network and processing bandwidth requirements; and are standalone technologies, applicable to specific industries and usage patterns.'

[www.idc.com/events/climate](http://www.idc.com/events/climate)

Twenty million pounds is to be invested in innovative energy efficiency measures to cut emissions and energy bills in central government departments. The allocation is part of the package of £405m low carbon funding announced at the Budget in April to help establish the UK as a market leader in renewable technology and advance green manufacturing.

Sixteen English councils are set to reduce their energy bills by nearly £1m per year and cut their annual carbon emissions by nearly 4,700 tonnes after receiving the green light for their energy efficiency projects. The councils have been awarded nearly £4m in interest-free loans from the £51.5m Carbon Trust fund.

Crawley Borough Council is reporting substantial savings - averaging 11% on annual mileage per vehicle - across its Amenity Services Fleet thanks to live tracking and logging of vehicle movements over the internet via Masternaut Three X.

## Videoconference to cut CO<sub>2</sub>

Amey has cut 40,000 kilos of carbon emissions and saved £180,000 in its first year using Tandberg videoconferencing systems. VMeetings now enable staff to schedule virtual meetings and register attendees through its intranet. "Lots of people were driving long distances for fairly short, routine meetings," said Keith Sexton, Amey's director of health, safety, environment and quality.



## ContactPoint rolls out

The government is forging ahead with the introduction of ContactPoint to every English local authority, saying that recent trials were an "outstanding success".

Supporters of the long-delayed £224m project say it will make England's 11 million young people safer by providing a single register that can be used by all child protection professionals.

An evaluation report of the initial phase of the ContactPoint roll out, 'Lessons Learned from the Early Adopter Phase', states that early feedback from practitioners is good, with over 75% believing ContactPoint will be helpful in their future work. In one area a deputy principal has already been able to locate eight students missing from education for over a year using ContactPoint.

However the future of the project remains in doubt as both the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats have vowed to abandon it.

ContactPoint was developed in response to a key recommendation of the Laming Inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié and has been designed to help frontline practitioners work across organisations, arming authorised professionals with a quick and easy tool to find out who else is working with the same child as early and as quickly as possible.

**Privatise to survive:** Councils are advised to prioritise spending and outsource more services. Councils, rather than Whitehall, should commission new partnerships that focus on mutual interests and pre-determined meaningful outcomes which can be achieved 'using fluid budgets', argue think tank, Localis, and KPMG. A new report, 'The Bottom Line - a vision for local government', states that such a move would allow services to be 'more personalised around the requirements of the end user'. Councils are advised to reassess their priorities against cost and innovate. 'If they are to achieve much needed expenditure reductions of around 20% by 2011' they will need to 'look long and hard at the services they provide and find new ways of managing them if they are to cut costs'. [www.localis.org.uk](http://www.localis.org.uk)

**Birmingham chief hits out at barriers to total place:** Radical reforms in public funding and governance will be necessary to make the 'total place' concept of integrated services a reality, says Jason Lowther, director of policy and delivery at Birmingham City Council. The city has identified seven barriers to organising services around individual citizens rather than organisations. Top of the list was "short term financial horizons" making it impossible to create a business case for early interventions. "We need to talk to Treasury about paybacks over a ten to fifteen year period," Lowther said.

**S**top thief: Police forces from South Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire took just 30 minutes to intercept and



recover a stolen Nottinghamshire County Council pick-up truck. The vehicle had recently been equipped with a Thatcham Category 5 satellite tracking device from Masternaut Three X.

## Scotland takes the high road to online health

As political flak continues to fly over the £13bn programme for IT in the English NHS, eyes are turning to its Scottish counterpart to see what can be done.

The NHS north of the border has given GPs, health help-line advisers and accident and emergency doctors electronic access to the summary records of nearly all patients.

The service is also about to sign a national contract to modernise hospital software.

Nearly all practices in Scotland are now connected to the Emergency Care Summary (ECS), a basic set of read-only data including drug prescriptions. Dr Libby Morris, chair of the Emergency Care Summary Board, NHS Scotland, told the E-Health Insider Live conference in Birmingham that the programme had provoked little dissent. The system holds 5.4 million patient records (including those of deceased patients, which are held for two years). Only 1,400 patients, or 0.02%, have opted out.

This is in marked contrast to England, where the equivalent Summary Care Record (SCR) is running years behind schedule because of doctors' worries over patient confidentiality and consent.

Dr Morris said the record had already helped saved lives. In one case, a 62-year-old woman admitted in an emergency went into a coma and a pharmacist who checked the ECS found she should have been receiving insulin.

The key to success was gaining doctors support, and providing systems that audit unauthorised accesses.

**Nomad home:** The original e-government project to provide mobile and flexible working for local authorities, due to close in November through lack of funding, has been given two new leases of life. Project Nomad is to split into two: Nomad North and Nomad Scotland, with Ken Eastwood of Barnsley MBC and Nomad Scotland chair, Aberdeenshire's Mark Baker, to take over the initiative. [www.projectnomad.org.uk](http://www.projectnomad.org.uk)

## Smith minister for e-government

It has taken some time since the reshuffle in July, but the government has finally named the minister responsible for e-government and information security - and it is Angela Smith.

The Basildon and East Thurrock MP is also minister for the Office of the Third Sector and her work includes working with voluntary and community groups, social enterprises, charities, cooperatives and mutuals. The Cabinet Office has confirmed that to her portfolio has been added responsibility for the Office of Government Chief Information Officer and information security and assurance.

Other responsibilities ratified are that work and pensions minister, Jim Knight, will take on finding ways to include the four million people digitally excluded. He will also take on the role of webczar for the government's one click site, Directgov. As departmental IT and data security minister, he will sip from the poisoned chalice of being held responsible for senior politicians and civil servants who lose laptops and memory sticks with sensitive information on them in the backs of cabs...

At the Department for Children, Schools and Families, schools minister Diana Johnson's responsibilities include ICT and the digital curriculum. And ContactPoint has been given to Baroness Morgan in the House of Lords.

**ICO gets teeth:** The cost of storing and managing electronic data could rise as the government consults on £500,000 penalties for serious breaches of data protection principles. 'Civil Monetary Penalties: Setting the maximum penalty', seeks views on government plans to fine organisations which mismanage data or fail to comply with the Data Protection Principles set out in the Data Protection Act 1998. Justice minister, Michael Wills, said, "We want to ensure that the Information Commissioner's Office has the powers it needs and is able to impose robust penalties on those who commit serious breaches of data protection principles." Consultation closes on 21 December 2009: [www.justice.gov.uk](http://www.justice.gov.uk)

## Local partnerships will end power of big IT vendors

Adam Afriyie, shadow minister for science and innovation, says that a future Conservative government would reduce the power of a small number of large IT suppliers.

The Tories are considering the use of multiple proof-of-concept pilot projects: "If several suppliers are asked to come up with working solutions, they can then be piloted, and the most successful can be scaled up and rolled out nationally."

This would, he said, "reduce reliance on a handful of big vendors and increase the proportion of IT budgets spent with innovative young companies."

He added, "By using standard data formats, like XML, government can open up the procurement process to the widest possible base of suppliers. With inter-operability, large projects can be split into manageable, modular chunks... The outcome is a more flexible procurement process where it is easier to change suppliers and resolve problems as they emerge."

**Lansley pledges telecare advances:** "NHS investment in telecare benefits local authorities by reducing their domiciliary care costs," said shadow minister, Andrew Lansley. "So we will require PCTs to promote joint working with local authorities. That means budget pooling and joint commissioning." Lansley said that telecare, mobile technology which identifies risk and monitors patients electronically, has been shown to work - a project in north west Surrey reduced the number of people entering residential care by 11% in a year.

**Recession begins to bite local authorities:** Many local authorities are sitting on a financial time bomb as the true cost of recession - in terms of job losses, bad debt, fraud and the consequent demand on public services - has yet to impact on public finances, according to Experian's Quarterly Insight report. The full costs will occur several months after unemployment peaks and continue after economic growth resumes. Authorities in the north east will among the be hardest hit. London boroughs such as the City of London, Westminster and Kensington and Chelsea will see relatively less impact.

## Britain Works

Microsoft is offering £18m worth of training vouchers for the community in its Britain Works Challenge.

The software giant has put its money where its mouth is by backing up its 'Britain Works' campaign with a competition offering £18m of training and exam vouchers for the best local authority programmes addressing unemployment and digital skills in the community. Three councils will share the prize; however, all entrants will receive complementary IT Academy membership to support local activity. Closing date 18 December: [www.microsoft.com/uk/challenge](http://www.microsoft.com/uk/challenge)

