

## Public Sector News

**Jane Inman, Technical Librarian, Planning, Transport and Economic Strategy, Warwickshire County Council ([janeinman@warwickshire.gov.uk](mailto:janeinman@warwickshire.gov.uk))**

### E-Government

E-Government has moved into a new phase with work to encourage the take up of local government electronic services which local authorities were required to have in place by the end of last year. The campaign, run by the Cabinet Office, targeted the regional press at the end of March and then, after the local elections in May, the national press, radio, online and outdoor media will be used.

The campaign will encourage use of the Directgov site (<http://www.direct.gov.uk>) to direct visitors via a post code search to local services. The underlying work was done by the Local Directgov programme and you can find details of the take-up campaign at <http://www.localgov.gov.uk/takeupcampaign>

Currently the Directgov site itself, launched in April 2004, receives 2million hits a month but it has not until now been promoted in any vigorous way. Indeed the Financial Times described it as the 'secret site'. (*Financial Times 6<sup>th</sup> March 2006 Nicholas Timmins 'Secret' site to get £1.8m airing*). Advertising for Directgov has now begun and the Directgov service is also available on digital television through Sky, Telewest and NTL and via an i-mode pilot on O2.

Directgov has had a change of home as from April 2006 it moved from the Cabinet Office to the Central Office of Information.

Some time ago the Government announced a digital challenge with a prize fund of £7m to encourage local authorities to create wired-up communities and in turn to tackle social exclusion. Proposals for the scheme had to be in by April 28<sup>th</sup> and implementation of the schemes would begin in April 2007. <http://www.digitalchallenge.gov.uk>

### Local authority web sites

SOCITM published its 8th survey of local government web sites in March and found that 60 of the 468 sites were now classed as transactional which is the highest category in the survey. They expressed concern in the report that accessibility issues still needed to be addressed and that some of the other targets known as 'priority service outcomes' had not been delivered. These include things such as e-planning, road works information and school admissions. *Better connected 2006* SOCITM <http://www.socitm.gov.uk>  
Another challenge for local authorities is that by the end of 2006 all local authority web sites should be using the Integrated Public Sector Vocabulary in the subject field of metadata. Version 2.00 was issued in April and includes a set of terms for use when indexing internal or administrative documents. More information at <http://www.esd.org.uk/standards/ipsv>

One of the benefits of writing a column like this has to be that you can record your own organisation's success! In Warwickshire we were thrilled to be selected as best environmental web site at the British Environment and Media Awards this year. It was pleasing to win a competition not limited to local authority work and to show that local

authority web sites can compete with other organisations in the field. To see what an award winning site looks like go to <http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/environment> or visit the WWF site who sponsored the awards

[http://www.wwf.org.uk/news/n\\_0000002430.asp](http://www.wwf.org.uk/news/n_0000002430.asp) for details of the award.

We are not alone though as Lichfield District Council has been selected as an Official Honoree in the international Webby awards. See <http://www.lichfielddc.gov.uk/> for details of their success.

## Europe

I don't usually cover European issues but there seems to be quite a bit that is relevant at the moment. Firstly there are plans for a network of 25 'information relays' across the UK which will be set up by the European Commission and known as Europe Direct. The centres will provide information on 'single market rights such as travelling, working and studying across the EU.' They will be in place by May 2006 and will build on what is already in place in the way of European Information Centres. The European Commission's UK Representation has announced where the centres will be hosted.

[http://europa.eu.int/unitedkingdom/press/press\\_releases/2006/pr0616\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/unitedkingdom/press/press_releases/2006/pr0616_en.htm)

The European Digital Library is a European Commission project to give digital access to more than six million books, documents and other cultural works via the web by 2010. In March 2006 the Commission published the results of a consultation on the project, which shows general support for the idea but differences of opinion over the copyright issues related to the scheme. This project is part of the wider i2010 strategy designed to improve the digital economy in Europe.

You can view the portal of the European Library at

<http://www.theeuropeanlibrary.org/portal/index.htm> or for more information on the consultation go to

[http://europa.eu.int/information\\_society/activities/digital\\_libraries/doc/communication/results\\_of\\_online\\_con](http://europa.eu.int/information_society/activities/digital_libraries/doc/communication/results_of_online_con)

Europe is also backing a research project to look at the return on investment of public sector IT projects. The project called PICTURE (Process Identification and Clustering for Transparency in Reorganising Public Administration!) will develop a method for calculating the potential benefits of investments in IT systems.

<http://europa.eu.int/idabc/en/chapter/194>

In February the European Commission called on member states to improve the transfer of electronic information between local and national government across Europe and announced its intention to develop an EU Action Plan on e-government. The plan would tackle technical interoperability, and language or semantic interoperability but would also try to make information available for citizen events and business events in a seamless way. <http://europa.eu.int/idabc/en/home>

Public Sector News is supplied by ALGIS (The Affiliation of Local Government Information Specialists) which represents information professionals providing information services to local authority staff and elected members. Jane Inman is currently Chair of ALGIS. For more information go to <http://www.algis.org.uk>