

Public Sector News

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E-Government – new standards

With e-Government targets behind us, the public sector now has a set of e-service delivery standards to work to. Published last month, the National e-Service Delivery Standards cover the ten areas of:

- Adult services
- Customer services
- E-building control
- E-environmental health
- Highways
- Housing
- Human resources
- ICT services
- Property services
- Trees

Local authorities can assess how well they are doing through a self-assessment tool made available on the esd-toolkit site (www.esd.org.uk) Standards are set as 'minimum' (that match the standards already set by the Best Value Performance Indicator 157 and the Priority Service Outcomes so should be in place), 'progressing' and 'excellent'.
<http://www.nesds.gov.uk/>

E-Government take up

E-Government take-up was mentioned in the last issue of eLucidate and is the focus of e-Government currently as central government tries to ensure all the work and money poured into the e-Government projects pays off. A national publicity campaign has been launched and called 'Connect to your council'. I have to admit that it has all passed me by apart from the rather critical coverage it has received from some quarters.

The plan has been to promote the use of the Directgov service, which can be found at <http://www.directgov.gov.uk>, and this site has been enhanced to provide links to local

authority information. Local authorities were required to provide links to a number of areas of information, and the areas being promoted in particular are abandoned vehicles, graffiti, dumped rubbish, potholes, garden rubbish and street lights. The images used are rather depressing! They can be seen at <http://local.direct.gov.uk/mycouncil/>. Other areas covered include renewing library books, school term dates, before and after school child care and paying parking fines. It strikes me some of these could have been provided a more positive image for local government than the ones selected.

Directgov

If you haven't used the Directgov site (and it has been described as the 'shy' site) you will find information on a range of central government services as well as the links to local government services discussed above. <http://www.directgov.gov.uk>.

The site has grown to cover many aspects of life that require us to interact with government, such as submitting tax forms online, paying for car tax (without having to queue in the Post Office!) or applying for a passport. It also gives what might be described as public service information, such as advice on child care, planning for retirement or filling your leisure time. Official information such as when the Union Jack should be flown on public buildings, how laws are made and what consultations are being undertaken are there too.

Local e-Government responsibility

Following the recent ministerial changes, responsibilities for local e-Government has been taken on by Angela Smith, MP for Basildon and East Thurrock, in what is now the Department of Communities and Local Government. She takes over from Jim Fitzpatrick.

In early June a new List of Ministerial Responsibilities was published and an electronic copy is available at http://cabinetoffice.gov.uk/ministerial_responsibilities/

Statute Law Database

A Statute Law database for the UK has been promised for many years but has suffered frequent delays. Heather Brooke writing in *The Times* picked up the issue and compared the UK situation with that in the USA. She claims the real difference is that in the USA statutes, regulations and judicial opinions from the government are not subject to copyright, which speeds up the process of making them publicly available. She reported on a failed attempt using the Freedom of Information Act to obtain raw data from the Department for Constitutional Affairs.

(Delays over statute law database are not in the public interest, Heather Brooke, The Times May 23 2006)

Reference works in public libraries

A major revolution in the provision of online reference tools has been facilitated by the [Museums, Libraries and Archives Council](http://www.mla.gov.uk) (MLA). It brings together 26 major reference works from 14 suppliers for use in public libraries and standard terms and conditions have been negotiated. This impressive negotiation is part of the 'Framework for the Future' initiative and should save public library authorities time and money in developing individual agreements with suppliers. Reference Online covers general reference material such as dictionaries and biography, newspapers, business and legal information. [http://www.mla.gov.uk/webdav/harmonise?Page/@id=73&Document/@id=23151&Section\[@stateld_eq_left_hand_root\]/@id=4332](http://www.mla.gov.uk/webdav/harmonise?Page/@id=73&Document/@id=23151&Section[@stateld_eq_left_hand_root]/@id=4332).

Freedom of Information

The House of Commons Constitutional Affairs Committee report into the first year of the Freedom of Information legislation concludes that it is working satisfactorily, although the committee was concerned at the speed of response to requests in some cases. For those of us working in the information world the real impact is not what is supplied in response to requests but what is routinely published that was not previously made available. Changes in the way public bodies make information available will probably take longer to filter through and be more difficult to identify as results of the legislation. www.parliament.uk/conaffcom.

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 www.algis.org.uk