Public Sector News

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More e-petitions

I mentioned e-petitions in the last issue of *eLucidate* when the petition against road pricing hit the headlines. Those on the No. 10 website are still attracting attention with, according to the Times, 7,123 open for signature in April. This demand means that No.10 is not always meeting the five-day deadline to assess and launch the petitions. They have certainly served as a means for people to express their concerns. (*Times Online* April 17 2007 "What have these things got in common?" Sean O'Neill*)*

Moving on to YouTube

Social networking sites are the latest technology to be used by politicians to spread the word. Tony Blair appeared on YouTube in April launching the Labour party's own video channel, and it is anticipated that political parties will exploit these channels to reach the younger voters.

Statistics

The Office for National Statistics has developed e-learning to help people use Neighbourhood Statistics. The first phase is available at http://neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/Info.do?page+Elearning_home.htm.

Module 1 contains videos and exercises on how to use the main 'Find Statistics for an area' and how to find background information about the data and Module 2 covers the more advanced 'create a customised table, chart or map' part of the site. FlashViewer is required. The material is particularly aimed at those working in regeneration.

Jobs on digital

The Department of Work and Pensions has been working through Jobcentre Plus and with Looking Local, the local government digital TV portal to deliver job details to jobseekers. It can be accessed by using Sky, cable TV or broadband-enabled Freeview boxes. The information will be searchable, and the search can be refined.

Children and government

DirectgoKids (http://direct.gov.uk/kids) was launched in March, and is aimed at children between the ages of 5 and 11. It includes games and animations that are intended to explain something of what government is about. It is claimed that it is the only resource of its type in the area. I am very out of touch with children in this age range, but I am afraid I have a feeling that there are much slicker offerings around for the IT-literate five-year-old. Even on a fairly high-spec laptop the content takes some time to load. There is one game in which you have to catch cow poo in a bucket. I found this a little worrying as it seems to have little to do with government (farming subsidies?), but what farmer ever tried to achieve this feat?

IT and democracy

As I write, the results of the local council elections are beginning to come in and you won't have missed press coverage of some of the problems experienced by local authorities involved in pilots of new technology at these elections. A full review of the pilots will be undertaken by the Electoral Commission, and its findings will be published in August. As well as looking at how the technology worked, they will be considering if it helped to engage particular communities in the democratic process, e.g. young people or ethnic minorities, and whether voters had confidence in the technology. The pilots included the use of Internet and telephone voting and electronic counting.

Digitised government papers

The National Archives has been awarded funding to create an online resource to show how the British Government managed major events of the twentieth century. This will involve digitising Cabinet papers from the First World War through to the 1970s. The material will all be already open under the 30-year rule, but the project is designed to make it more accessible. Funding is from the JISC, and is available to TNA for the next two years.

Neighbourhood Fix it!

Put in your postcode and see what potholes, graffiti, abandoned cars and other unpleasant things have been reported in your area. Being able to report this type of problem was a requirement of e-government, but we all went off and did it for just our own local authority area. Here is an organisation offering a national service, with the ability to see what has been reported so you don't duplicate the report, and to see what has been done about the problem. It is excellent, and it is a pity this wasn't developed as a National Project as part of e-government.

The site was created by the charity My Society, which has been responsible for a number of sites that try to engage people with their community. I see highway staff from my own Directorate responding on the site to report actions taken to resolve issues raised, which is good. It develops a dialogue around what could be described as street-scene issues and encourages a public-spirited and responsible concern for the local area. At the risk of sounding a bit 'jobs worth', I can also see that it could raise customer expectations to a level that cannot be delivered within limited local authority budgets.

ePolitix

I know the world is now full of RSS feeds, blogs, wikis and old fashioned e mail alerts but one specifically designed to keep you in touch with politics and Parliamentary matters is worth a mention in the context of this article. ePolitix.com provides political and parliamentary news covering Westminster, the Scottish Parliament, the assemblies in Wales and London and the European parliament, as well as developments in Northern Ireland through three daily bulletins. Worth a look – especially as it's free!

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. ALGIS welcomes anyone with an interest in public sector information who feels they would benefit from being part of a community working in the same area. For more information go to http://www.algis.org.uk.