



Requirements of service deliverers and service delivery environments

Vision

The individual visions of CitizenFirst partners talk about establishing ICT infrastructure in order to facilitate improvement to office processes and develop citizen-facing and citizen-friendly services. Moreover, there is commonality in the way in which support for growing the Information Society is emphasised. This is not just about 'e-enabling' but also includes concern for addressing the 'digital divide', identifying citizens' needs, the importance of publicity and citizen feedback, and the role of training and lifelong skills development. Finally, there is considerable weight attached to the use of partnership and the integration of services. Such issues are particularly pertinent for the regional authorities as opposed to the cities, as the greater area presents further challenges to work with many different agencies.

Evident from this analysis is the synergy between the overall visions of the partner authorities, and the vision and aims of the CitizenFirst project. It is potentially valuable, therefore, to make this as visible as possible in order that buy-in from colleagues and partners is made easier and a more natural progression.

Access channel strategies

Looking at partners' channel strategies, the major focus is evidently about internet information and service provision. The use of authority websites is central, but more significant developments are in terms of portals or virtual one-stop-shops that bring together a range of services to one (virtual) place. This is a pervasive theme, very much about ease of access for citizens and removing the need to understand fully who is providing the service (e.g. www.cambridgeshire.net). In addition, such initiatives are looking to increase citizen participation and feedback.

Another focus is on face-to-face contact either at offices or physical one-stop-shops, with emphasis placed on the enabling ability of ICT. Examples include City Hall in Ieper, and OSSs at Kilrush and Ennystymon in Ireland and Cambourne in Cambridgeshire.

The telephone is clearly still a vital access channel, and in Cambridgeshire this has been supported by the development of a Contact Centre. This has permitted one number to access a great range of services, with staff supported by Customer Relationship Management tools and so forth, delivered over the Cambridgeshire Community Network (CCN). Cambridgeshire is also to trial smartcard technology to allow citizens a range of authenticated access to services.

While there are significant commonalities, a key issue here is that the international nature of this project should be exploited as far as possible. Thus partners should seek to learn from each others' experiences given the different ways in which similar approaches are being tackled. Close working right through the demonstration pilots is needed to appreciate fully the range of channels and the appropriateness of their use in relation to the requirements of service deliverers, which clearly includes external partners for each authority.

Targeting the excluded

If the digital divide is really to be tackled, the way in which vulnerable, remote or excluded groups are targeted is critical. Part of this is about the access to ICTs themselves. In that sense, there are several initiatives run by partners that address the requirement to provide accessible ICT. Project such as the PIAPs in Kortrijk and community access points in Cambridgeshire as part of 'CCN' address the need for PC and internet access for those without. These schemes aim to bring the technology as close as possible to the communities that need them. This is about meeting a basic geographic requirement. Furthermore, schemes are in place to ensure access to specialist ICT for those with special needs for instance. This is a particular identified requirement in Ieper and Kortrijk,

where close working with WVA, a disabled persons organisation, is helping to elucidate needs and investigate the best ways of meeting those needs.

Over and above the physical access to ICT is the need for relevant content that helps to meet the requirements of service providers in reaching potentially excluded groups. On this, there are obligations identified for compliance with standards such as W3C specifications (www.w3c.org) as well as a need to make use of practical advice such as from the Royal National Institute of the Blind (RNIB) (http://www.rnib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/code/public_rnib003460.hcsp). Further consideration on content is needed with regard to certain excluded and minority groups. This is supported by projects such as Cambridgeshire's forthcoming work on disadvantaged young people in Wisbech and Ieper's work on addressing the needs of teenagers and also the elderly in their portal development. From this study, it looks likely that there are considerable further opportunities in this area, based on content development and mediated access to ICT which targets specific groups. In order to make sense of this, partnership working must be central.

Drivers

The overarching external driver for much of this work revolves around the eEurope 2005 targets, and local implementations of that vision. This covers the rollout of online government services and various priorities in terms of accessibility. It is important for the CitizenFirst work to be seen in the context of this rationale and to identify how the best use of these developments can be made. For instance the interplay between local developments and central points of access such as the Public Services Broker in Ireland or DirectGov and the Government Gateway in the UK are potentially damaging for citizens' perceptions if not handled well.

Above all, the drivers behind e-government are not predominantly seen to be about cost savings but rather about improved services. However, it is important to set projects in the context of their business case, which must encompass the financial aspects. This is especially pertinent in the UK where the Gershon report (http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/879E2/efficiency_review120704.pdf) has identified the need for efficiency savings in the public sector.

Partnership

There is a range of partnership engagement across the partners. Kortrijk for instance are part of a sub-regional partnership, Leiedal, involved with ID cards and local business databases as well as working closely with

Mentor vzw-Katho on this project in delivering ICT for people with special needs.

In contrast, MWRA is part of the Shannon Broadband Consortium, with a more technical focus on delivery of neutral carrier broadband. Similarly, CCN in Cambridgeshire is largely about the establishment of the broadband network in partnership with NTL. However, both of these situations have much wider remits than merely the technology. Rather, they work towards community-focussed goals and therefore necessarily involve further partnerships. Again, the variety of knowledge and experience of different partners is potentially very valuable when pooled to inform developments as the demonstration pilots move forward.