LAWs
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Local Authority Websites National Project

Altering the focus:
Integrating websites into the delivery
of council priorities

Developed for LAWs by

I&DeA
improvement and development agency

Contents

1. Introduction

Performance management and e-government

In 2002 the Audit Commission set out some key issues for councils to help them move their emerging e-government programmes in the right direction. Their analysis was based on their research with some 'early succeeder' councils who had established their vision for e-government and taken a lead in their approach to the e-government agenda. [reference: Message Beyond the Medium: Improving local government services through e-government, Audit Commission 2002].

2002 was relatively early days for e-government and it is useful to use it as a yardstick to review overall progress in the development of e-government programmes. Much work has been done since it was produced to address some of the key areas it identifies – to develop councils' understanding of the potential of technology, to ensure leadership and local ownership of the e-government programmes and to build councils' capacity to deliver e-government. This work has been done, and continues to be done, by individual councils, by the pathfinder and national projects and by a range of other key players.

While there has been significant progress in these areas, other areas identified by the Audit Commission as key components to the successful establishment of e-government programmes remain generally very much at the point they were in 2002. These are:

- making e-government an integral part of local priorities and core objectives and establishing how it will improve core services and meet local needs

- establishing local performance targets that allow councils to know if their e-government activities have been successful and

- monitoring progress against targets and reviewing whether objectives are being met

The national strategy for local e-government, published in late 2002 by the ODPM again re-states the need for a focus on local priorities - ' Local priorities must drive e-government. As e-government is not an end in itself, the objectives of your local e-government strategy must be those of your mainstream services and of your Community Strategy.'

More recently research work by Socitm [reference: Better Connected: building for the future, Socitm Insight 2004] identified factors that are critical to successful websites. The first two of these reflect the same issues of integration at a strategic level that the Audit Commission raised in 2002:

- commitment: ensuring that websites are part of councils' core strategies and

- ownership: ensuring that website developments are owned by councillors, managers and staff throughout the organisation

How do we address these things -integrating our websites and broader e-government programmes with our core priorities and rooting them in the needs of citizens? How do we establish ownership throughout the council and follow this through by measuring and assessing the impact of e-government initiatives?

The generic approach that sets out a framework for addressing all these areas is known as performance management and is an essential element of an authority's overall management arrangements. Together the areas listed above are component parts of the cycle of performance management – which can be broadly defined as what an organisation does in order to achieve its aspirations and implement local and national priorities.

> 'Not losing sight of what matters most to local people when delivering e-government requires a strong performance management framework.'

> Source: Message Beyond the Medium: Improving local government services through e-government
> Audit Commission, 2002 [http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/]

A focus on delivering service and local priorities

The need to address the national e-government agenda and to meet the national target for e-government for 2005, together with access to funding for projects, has driven many council's e-government programmes forward. However, at a time when the 2005 e-government targets are close enough for us to be planning beyond them, it is important to ensure that e-government remains a driver for modernisation and improvement in local government.

Councils are putting significant effort into developing and improving their websites; they also need to be established as an integral way of achieving organisational priorities and delivering service improvement within a performance management framework. If this is not done there is a risk that they are viewed as a separate entity, not linked to core objectives and competing with other organisational priorities for limited resources, and driven by central government targets rather than local need.

The focus nationally in e-government is moving towards establishing links between e-government and the national shared priorities for local government, demonstrating the value of e-government investment and the impact of this investment on citizens.

In early 2004 the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) consulted on its proposals for defining e-government priority services. In the introduction to the consultation document they say that 'Linking local e-government investment to the delivery of service improvement in shared priority areas serves to address the real concerns of citizens, as well as providing a focus for local authorities up to the 2005 target and beyond.'

To ensure long-term success of website and broader e-government initiatives, this link to policy and priorities also needs to be made firmly at a local level.

> 'Performance management together with monitoring information should allow you to demonstrate you are achieving what you set out to achieve and that you are having an impact on council priorities. Demonstrating value in this way is key to be able to keep an initiative going in the longer term.'
> e-Government champion, Canterbury City Council

About this guide

This guide is intended to be useful for councils seeking to:

- tie their website initiatives to their organisation's core policies and objectives

- implement website initiatives to gain maximum impact for citizens and

- measuring and assessing the effect of their websites on the delivery of core policies

The guide takes a performance management perspective and the view that an effective performance management framework allows organisations to turn their ambitions for delivering service improvement and local priorities into reality. It summarises the characteristics of an effective performance management framework and the links between policy and website developments.

Included in the guide are some examples from councils who have started to take a policy driven approach to their website development. We talked to a range of authorities who have been recognised for the quality of their overall website or for particular website initiatives or who have well established performance management systems.

We found generally that the development of council websites, and also their broader e-government programmes, are not well integrated with council policies and priorities. At the same time there are certain areas of website development in which significant links to local policy are being made.

As e-government programmes mature, councils are increasingly concerned to ensure they are able to show demonstrable results in the achievement of key priorities. While none of the councils we talked to claimed they had the answer to achieving this, they recognised its importance. We are grateful for the time people contributed to sharing the approaches they are taking.

2. An overview of performance management

In this section we take an overview of performance management and look at how website development can integrate into a performance management framework.

2.1 The growing focus on performance management

Improving public services is at the top of the government agenda. The demand for improvement and the pace of improvement have increased dramatically in the last few years. Local authorities today are faced with a complex range of challenges, including their new community leadership role, Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) and Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) as well as the e-government agenda.

Performance management provides the framework to help link and underpin both the national initiatives that make up the modernisation agenda and the achievement of local priorities. Most councils recognise the importance of performance management and the need to develop effective performance management arrangements.

While there is a growing focus on performance management in local government, the development of effective, sustainable and embedded performance management arrangements is likely to take several years. Even those authorities identified through the CPA process as being good at performance management demonstrate an on-going commitment to improve and are continually working on one or more aspects of their performance management arrangements.

2.2 The building blocks of performance management

Performance management is broadly the processes, cultures and behaviours that turn an organisation's ambitions or priorities into delivery.

It is about:
- Having clear aims and objectives for achieving the goals of the organisation and of the local community and providing a structured approach for strategic management.

- Prioritising what gets done and making sure there are enough resources to do it.

- Creating links between individual, service and corporate objectives.

- Devising performance targets and being able to measure performance against those targets.

- Ensuring that the performance measures identify strengths and areas for improvement and help the organisation become more results orientated.

- Creating ownership of performance measures and taking action to ensure that staff are accountable for individual, team or community targets being met.

- Keeping objectives under review to ensure they remain relevant.

- Providing leadership and reinforcing messages to ensure staff stay motivated to improve.

The building blocks of effective performance management

Bold Aspirations
to stretch and motivate the organisation

Prioritised objectives
appropriately resourced

Performance measures & targets
against which performance & progress can be measured

Ownership & accountability
to ensure ownership of targets at the right level

Rigorous performance review
to ensure that improvments in performance are being delivered

Reinforcement
to ensure staff stay motivated to improve

Review of progress
in delivering objectives which may lead to revised strategic direction

Adapted from: Choosing the Right FABRIC, A Framework for Performance Information, HM Treasury, Cabinet Office, National Audit Office, Audit Commission and Office for National Statistics [http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk]

Effective performance management arrangements can help integrate planning, review, financial, management and improvement systems to enable managers to make informed decisions and continue to improve services.

There are a number of performance management models that may be used within an authority which vary in their approach but the fundamental structure and aim of the models are essentially the same.

2.3 What does a good performance management system mean in practice?

Canterbury City Council has received an excellent CPA rating and recognition for the systems it has in place to manage performance. Their CPA assessment found 'clear links between individual work plans, service plans and corporate plans'. It found that 'Performance monitoring focuses on priorities and enables councillors and managers to understand the reasons for variation in performance'.

Development of their performance management system has taken several years. They use a relatively simple traffic light system that allows easy analysis of performance and provides explanations for variations in performance compared with targets. At first they successfully embedded a paper-based system in the organisation and then they developed their own computerised version of the system. Their requirements for their performance management system have developed as their performance management framework has matured and they are now looking to replace their own system with a more mature commercial web-based solution. They want a system that will allow them to set all their key inter-related strategies within their performance management framework and to measure progress against them efficiently and in a variety of ways. They also want a system that all their key partners have access to including their Local Strategic Partnership to allow them to be involved in monitoring progress against their Community Strategy.

They emphasise the fact that, while the processes and systems that support performance management are important, the culture that supports it is equally important. As well as making people aware and accountable for performance and performance improvement the council has supported the development of a 'no blame culture' that gets people thinking honestly and objectively about service improvement.

The council's website has not been prioritised for development in the past. However, this is now changing as the e-government agenda becomes embedded in the actions and targets set within their corporate plan. One of the aims within their corporate plan is to ' achieve excellence in delivering services'. Related to this the council has identified a number of objectives and, at the next level down, related actions and targets and has built the development of the website, a contact centre and work to e-enable services into these.

Integration of the website into the council's performance management framework in this way ensures that its development is seen as directly supporting one of the council's identified priorities for improvement. It will help ensure that the development of the website is prioritised in the future and is delivered and monitored for effectiveness within the council's performance management framework.

2.4 Learning more about performance management

The IDeA (Improvement and Development Agency) and the Audit Commission are working on a joint project to develop a common understanding and approach to performance management, measurement and information (PMMI). The project aims to:

- Build on the experience of those who have developed successful performance management and measurement approaches.
- Review existing knowledge within each organisation and to identify gaps and contradictions.
- Develop a range of performance management products to help improvement in authorities.

The project will deliver the latest thinking on how best to approach performance management in local government. The latest findings from this project as well as information on existing performance management resources can be found on the IDeA knowledge website under 'Improving your council [http://www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk]

3. Performance measurement

Performance measurement is an essential part of a performance management framework and allows improvement to be measured and evaluated. Beyond national performance indicators like the national e-government performance indicator (BVPI 157), councils need to develop and make good use of a wide range of measures as part of their performance-monitoring framework.

What you measure and how this information is used to drive improvement requires some thought. This section contains an overview of the characteristics of performance measures. It also includes some examples from authorities that are trying to make use of them to measure the impact of their websites.

3.1 Why we need performance measures

Successful organisations measure their performance in order to know how well they are performing, to identify their weaknesses and to take action to improve. Performance measures are an important part of the performance management process and form the link between setting out to deliver something and assessing whether this has been achieved. Osborne and Gaebler, in 'Reinventing Government', said:

> *If you don't measure results, you can't tell success from failure*
> *If you can't see success, you can't reward it*
> *If you can't reward success, you're probably rewarding failure*
> *If you can't see success, you can't learn from it*
> *If you can't recognise failure, you can't correct it*
> *If you can demonstrate results, you can win public support*
> *What gets measured gets done*
>
> Source: Extract from Osborne & Gaebler, Reinventing Government, 1992

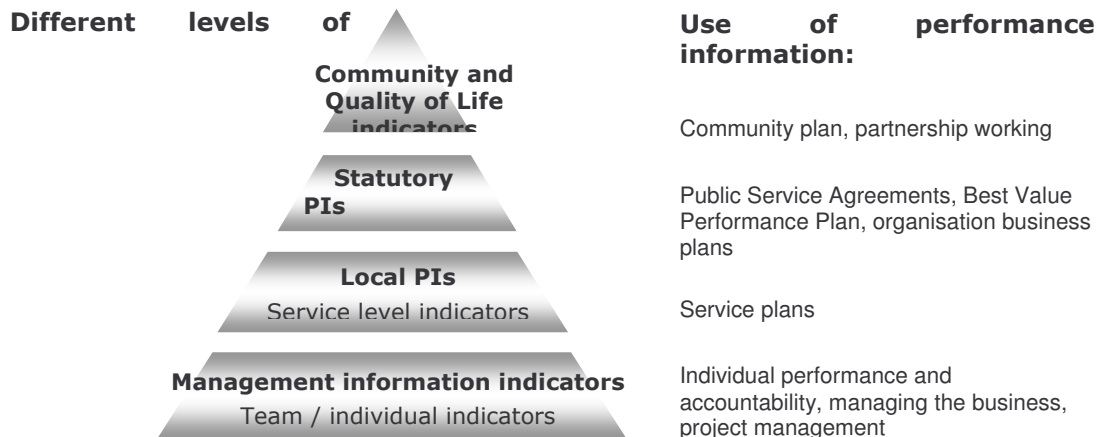## 3.2 Characteristics, level and types of performance measurement

Despite the fact that local authorities have been collecting and publishing performance information for a decade now, many are still struggling to measure effectively and to use the information to make decisions and drive improvement.

This section looks at aspects of performance measurement that need to be considered in order to devise appropriate measures.

Performance measures at different levels in an organisation

Performance measures should link to the authority's aims and should show how the organisation, services, projects or individuals are performing. As managers need different types of measures to reflect different levels of the organisation, there will be a hierarchy of measures reflecting the structure of the organisation. The number of measures will vary at each level of the organisation. For example, there are likely to be more measures designed to inform the day-to-day management of the authority than measures reflecting the impact on the quality of life of the community.

Performance measures reflect different levels of an organisation

Different levels of	Use of performance information:
Community and Quality of Life indicators	Community plan, partnership working
Statutory PIs	Public Service Agreements, Best Value Performance Plan, organisation business plans
Local PIs Service level indicators	Service plans
Management information indicators Team / individual indicators	Individual performance and accountability, managing the business, project management

Source: Making Performance Management Work, IDeA:

General characteristics of performance measures

Within the overall performance measurement system, individual measures should have the following general characteristics:

- *Relevant* to what the organisation is aiming to achieve.
- *Able to avoid perverse incentives* – not encouraging unwanted or wasteful behaviour.
- *Attributable* – the activity measured must be capable of being influenced by actions which can be attributed to the organisation or individual, and it should be clear where accountability lies.
- *Well defined* – with a clear definitions so that data will be collected consistently, and the measure is easy to understand and use.
- *Timely* – producing data regularly enough to track progress and quickly enough for all the data to still be useful.

- *Reliable* – accurate enough for its intended use, and responsive to change.
- *Comparable* with either past periods or similar programmes elsewhere
- *Verifiable* with clear documentation behind it, so that the processes that produce the measure can be validated.

Source: 'Choosing the Right FABRIC, A Framework for Performance Information', HM Treasury, Cabinet Office, National Audit Office, Audit Commission and Office for National Statistics, 2002: www.hm-treasury.gov.uk

Although these characteristics may seem self evident, in practice it can be difficult to devise performance indicators that satisfy all these criteria and trade offs are often necessary. For example councils may start with indicators that meet only some of the characteristics, while working towards improving the indicators as their performance measurement process develops.

Measuring the impact of the website on performance

In measuring the impact of the website on performance there are broadly three types of performance measure - project and implementation measures, operational or service measures and measures of outcome for service users and the community. Each type of measures will have a different user and use.

- *Project and implementation measures* aim to measure implementation progress. They are primarily input and process measures – that is they are measures of whether you have implemented a project successfully. The primary audience for this information will be the project team, those with responsibility for the project and inter-related projects.

  Project and implementation measures are likely to address aspects of quality, cost and time in implementing a project.

  For example:

Project measures indicating quality might	tests used to assess the accessibility of a website design or its compliance with the use of Plain English.

- *Operational or service delivery measures* aim to measure the final products, goods and services produced by the authority for delivery to the customer. These measures will help to give some indication of the impact on service delivery. They are predominantly output measures - that is the result of projects or initiatives. The primary audience for this information will be service managers and those responsible for delivery or managing front line staff.

The example below is hypothetical and is intended to demonstrate the use of operational measures.

For example:

For a **corporate policy** of	'*promoting the economic vitality of localities*'
One objective might be to	'*increase people's awareness of their benefits entitlement and encourage them to apply for benefits they are entitled to*'
Which might be **delivered** by	a number of initiatives including the use of the website to provide information and online forms. All initiatives would have their own individual measures.
A suitable **operational measure** might be	'*the change in the percentage of population of working age who are claiming key benefits.*' This measure would indicate the combined effect of the website, alongside other initiatives, in achieving the objective

The significant operational measure in this example is one that would be expected to demonstrate that the original objective had been delivered. The website is likely, as in this example, to be one of a number of initiatives whose combined effect would impact the operational measure.

The technology makes it very easy to collect website statistics and this type of data can provide some indication of the take up of an electronic service, although the data can be difficult to interpret. In the example above website usage and the number of applications received online would give an indication of usage of the online service. However, the website usage statistics need to be considered as part of a wider set of measures within a performance management framework to give a more comprehensive picture of performance. By themselves, in isolation from the performance framework they generally do not measure the impact on policy objectives.

- *Measures of outcome* aim to measure the impacts or consequences for the community of the activities of the authority. Outcomes are normally what an authority is trying to achieve in their corporate or community plan. The audience for these measures will include chief officers and members, partners and the community. They are likely to

be long term and any improvement is likely to be the result of a wide range of initiatives, which means that authorities are unlikely to see any improvement in these measures for some time. Outcome measures are the most difficult to develop and the most difficult to measure effectively.

For example:

For a **corporate policy** of	'*transforming our local environment*'
Outcome measures might include	'*the percentage of residents surveyed satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live*' or '*the percentage of adults surveyed who feel they can influence decisions affecting their local area*'

The IDeA and the Audit Commission recognise that the development of local performance indicators is not easy and they are giving practical help to authorities through the Library of Local Performance Indicators. The Library provides voluntary, 'off the shelf' indicators with detailed and consistent definitions.

For more information on the Library of Local Performance Indicators visit www.local-pi-library.gov.uk.

3.3 When local authorities don't use performance measures

It is not simple to get performance measurement right, but the absence of measures can have negative consequences for a council's e-government programme.

One authority we spoke to has been successful at putting services online and developing its e-government programme. The programme, however, is not well tied in with their performance management framework and few performance measures are used.

Their online schools admissions service has a good take up but there are no agreed performance measures or targets to evaluate the success of this service. The main drivers for putting schools admissions online was to increase access, improve customer service, and to reduce costs but no targets were set for the number of online admissions or reductions in cost of the service. It is generally thought that the service has improved and costs reduced but this view is currently not properly evidenced. As one manager commented 'We know where we want to get to but we don't

know how well we are progressing'. Another said 'It's only anecdotal that
there are cost savings or improvements in the service. The priority has
been to get the systems established.'

The library service has also gone online allowing citizens to order books
and pay fines via the website. While it is generally seen as successful
there are no agreed performance measures that help define and quantify
this perceived success. As a result there are conflicting views within the
authority about whether it is improving customer access and service or
whether it has been driven solely by central government targets and not
by the local business case.

4. Where websites fit within the national and local policy landscape

Performance management is driven at the top by strategic and policy level priorities.

We looked at the websites considered to be the best in local government (as evaluated by the Socitm Better Connected Survey 2003) in addition to a selection of councils that are known for specific website initiatives or for their performance management systems in order to form a picture of how websites are currently contributing to the delivery of local priorities and the national shared priorities.

This summary looks only at the contribution of websites and does not include other ways in which intranets, extranets or other e-government initiatives are being used to address local and national priorities.

A few more detailed examples from some of the councils that took part in the study are included.

4.1 Local priorities and websites

What are the local priority areas in which websites have real strengths and a significant role to play? We were not looking for innovative website usage but rather for ways in which websites have gained broad recognition for their role in the delivery of particular priorities and areas in which councils can expect to successfully support policy implementation with their websites.

We found the following frequently used local priorities are being supported in significant ways by website initiatives:

- improving customer service
- improving community engagement
- working with young people and children
- improving consultation and democratic engagement
- improving specific services

Improving customer service

Many authorities see improving their general customer service and communication as a priority. Integrating the council website with the development of a customer contact centre to act as a 'self service' version of the contact centre is a model many councils are using. The delivery of information via the website as well as the use of e-forms, email and e-enabled transactions then becomes coupled to the delivery of improvements to customer service and seen as an integral part of delivering this priority.

Salisbury District Council is one example of an authority with a priority to improve customer service. This priority is driving the development of a customer service centre and they are now integrating their corporate website into the delivery of this priority as well. This clarity of purpose has led to a narrowing of the focus for the site which has been redesigned to act as a 'virtual customer service centre' – quick and efficient for customers to use and focused on services rather than delivering broader information. 'We want it to be focused around this purpose rather than trying to do everything for everybody'.

The development of their website is linked into the top level of their performance management framework and this ensures that a clear direction is set for the development of the website that also that the website is seen to directly support the delivery of the council's key objectives for customer service.

Improving community engagement

Linked to their community plans and local strategic partnerships, many local authorities are seeking to improve the ways in which they engage with their local communities with the aim of revitalising or regenerating their local communities. A number of councils have developed 'community portals' to improve awareness of and access to information about local groups and at the same time provide the groups with a straight forward way of getting information onto the web. The focus is on making these a community resource, maintained by the groups themselves, rather that an information service provided by the council, and making the sites active forums for communication.

The South Wiltshire Community Web is an example of a community portal and holds information about local community and voluntary groups and businesses (see the examples in section 4.3 for more information). The community engagement tools that form part of the LAWs toolkit have been developed based on similar work done by the Welland Partnership and provide the tools to allow councils implementing the LAWs website to set up their own community portals.

Working with young people and children

Many councils are seeking to do more to engage with and improve services for children and young people. Consultation shows that this group is comfortable with new technology and that it is their first choice of communication medium. Many authorities are making use of websites in order to achieve progress in this area.

St Albans City and District Council has used the web to increase young people's participation in the democratic process making use of online opinion polls about local issues and a mock up of e-elections as part of two interactive projects with local schools (see the examples in section 4.3

for more information). Another example of a similar initiative is Derwentside District Council's SPICE project [http://www.spiceproject.org.uk] which aims to give children and young people a greater understanding of active citizenship and to get them more involved in local democracy. The website is a resource tool for the project which is working with schools in Derwentside and involving them in activities that allow them to learn more about their local community and the democratic process.

The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea's KC Central site is an example of a website designed to provide advice, help, guidance and information – from health to local events - for young people in a way that appeals to them (see the examples in section 4.3 for more information). Another example is South Tyneside Council's site for young people [http://jonnylonglife.com] which provides health-related information and advice on issues relevant to young people and includes information on sex education, fitness facilities, bullying, drug and alcohol problems.

Improving consultation and democratic engagement

Emerging from the development of their community leadership role, many authorities are seeking to increase citizen participation in local authority decision-making. Linked to this many councils are also aiming to improve democratic engagement and ultimately to increase the percentage of people voting in local and national elections.

Many councils are using their websites to better inform their citizens about key decisions made by councillors and to give them better access to related documents. Kirklees Council, for example, has a postcode based search to allow people to find decisions that affect their particular area [http://kirklees.gov.uk/you-kmc/decisions/diya.asp].

As outlined in the previous section – working with young people and children, there are also examples of councils using specially designed websites to increase awareness of the democratic process amongst this group.

The web also has potential for improving consultation. It opens up the possibility of increasing the numbers of people local authorities consult with and at the same time can broaden the ways in which authorities consult with people. It can also make consultation more of a two-way process. Councils are starting to explore a range of methods of electronic consultation - from snap surveys to closed forums consulting in detail on specific proposals. However, they are generally remaining cautious in the use of electronic consultation as they feel that web based consultations are not equally representative of all sections of society.

The Local e-Democracy national project, one of the second phase of local government online national projects, will identify good practice in this

area. To follow the progress of this project see the e-Government @ local
website [http://www.lcalegov.gov.uk]

Improving specific services

Where councils are identifying the need for improvements in specific
services – whether prompted by the CPA process or as part of their own
performance management work – many are looking to web and other e-
government tools to help them achieve significant improvement at an
accelerated rate.

For example, one authority we talked to had identified that their planning
service was not meeting service targets and so prioritised improvements
to the service as part of their performance management priorities. In the
first phase of improvement initiatives, the service will make use of
available web-based tools to improve the service for customers - for
example the submission of applications online and viewing planning
applications and decisions online. In the second phase, they plan to
improve performance and efficiency by re-engineering their back-office
processes, integrating the web-based services into their office planning
system and streamlining businesses processes. Progress will be assessed
with a set of performance measures and targets and integrated into their
corporate and service level performance plans.

4.2 The national shared priorities for local government

The broader national context of priorities is set by the shared national
priorities for local government. These were developed by the Central Local
Partnership and reflect priorities shared by national and local government:

- raising standards across our schools
- improving the quality of life of older people and of children, young
  people and families at risk
- promoting healthier communities and narrowing health inequalities
- creating safer and stronger communities
- promoting the economic vitality of localities
- transforming our local environment
- meeting local transport needs more effectively

These priorities are being developed further by the Office of the Deputy
Prime Minister (ODPM) and the Local Government Online Programme
(LGOL) to identify a specific set of priorities for local e-government
implementation, accompanied by a range of deliverables.

Websites have an integral part to play in delivering these broad high-level
priorities - in combination with sets of other initiatives within a
performance management framework. Below is a summary of the role we
found websites are currently playing in relation to each priority.

Raising standards across our schools

All sites provide basic information on local schools and many provide links to school websites.

Some sites - for example the London Borough of Camden's 'learning in Camden' pages [http://www.camden.gov.uk/learn/index.html] - have brought together a comprehensive set of related information on education and wider learning, libraries and other resources together with schools information under a 'learning' banner.

Other sites have an education focus - see for example the Isle of Wight's eduwight site [http://eduwight.iow.gov.uk/default.asp]- that presents a range of information for students, teachers, parents and governors in addition to basic schools information.

As outlined above under the local priority – working with young people and children, many councils have sites that provide detailed information and advice aimed at children and young people.

Many of the councils we looked at now provide good library facilities with on-line catalogues and book reservation and renewals facilities. A few of the councils are making their archives available using digitised images. See for example the COLLAGE project [http://collage.cityoflondon.gov.uk] which gives access to some 25,000 digital images of prints, maps and drawings from the City of London's collections. Another example is the FACET project [http://www.londonfacet.net/facet/index.jsp] in Kensington and Chelsea which is a partnership project that has brought together and digitised materials from a number of archive sources under local themes as an online learning and community resource.

Finally, some of the councils we looked at have an early involvement in the national project for online schools admissions which is set to improve the efficiency and consistency of the schools admissions process.

Improving the quality of life of older people and of children, young people and families at risk

Much of the information and online services relevant to raising standards across our schools is also relevant here.

In addition most websites we looked at provide advice on benefits and downloadable benefits forms.

There are also some housing service based initiatives which give users access to information on properties and information about applying to join their local housing register together with the eligibility criteria. See for example Kirklees Council's Homeline [http://www.kirklees.gov.uk/eGov/housing/default.asp] which brings together a range of housing related information and includes a home search facility with information on properties available in the area.

Another example is Home Connections [http://www.homeconnections.org.uk/default.asp] - a partnership project being led by the London Borough of Camden intended to provide current information about available housing and more choice for people on the council's housing register.

Promoting healthier communities and narrowing health inequalities

Promoting the economic vitality of localities

Creating safer and stronger communities

The most significant web based initiatives that support all of these community related priorities are community information and community portal type developments.

Most council sites hold a range of relevant information although this may be dispersed throughout their sites. The London Borough of Brent's Community Network (BRAIN) brings a wide range of social service and health information together under a 'healthy living' banner [http://brentbrain.org.uk] and includes comprehensive information about specific health topics and information aimed at specific groups.

Other councils have developed community portals as described in the previous section on local priorities - improving community engagement.

Transforming our local environment

Meeting local transport needs more effectively

Environment related initiatives include online reporting of abandoned vehicles, graffiti, streetlight faults and so on and this is found on many websites. A growing number also offer online planning applications and decisions and also building control and licensing forms.

Relevant information - from information on cycle routes to planned road works - can be found on sites. Hertfordshire County Council has brought a wide range of information together under their 'Environment channel' banner [http://www.hertsdirect.org/environment].

4.3 Some examples from the study

These examples show how website initiatives are being used to address service priorities. All have been led by business managers who understand the service priority, supported by e-government and technical staff.

KC Central – proving information aimed at young people in Kensington and Chelsea

[http://www.rbkc.gov.uk/kccentral/general]

The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea have developed a website designed to provide information for young people on local authority and health services and issues relevant to them. The site was developed with the input from a panel of young people and designed to meet the requirements they identified.

The requirement was identified by a research project funded jointly by Social Services and the Health Service to look at improving information for children and young people - a service priority.

Measuring performance

The site was set up with a target performance measure of 500 site visits per month which was based on figures for comparable local authority sites. Following the launch of their site it was promoted heavily with local schools and youth clubs and the number of people visiting the site was ten times the initial target (5000 visits per month). The project team is now aiming to sustain this number of visits to the site by sustaining interest in the site. To assist in doing this an on-going young people's management group has been set up to advise on how to develop the site and to ensure it stays relevant.

An additional measure that gave evidence beyond usage of how successful the project has been in meeting its objectives would be useful. The original research project that led to the development of this site assessed how effectively information was communicated. It would be possible to use a performance measure that assessed whether young people using the site were better informed, using the research as a comparative base.

Measures of outcome are the hardest to address for any policy and the business manager leading the project commented that the significant outcome was not really whether young people were better informed but whether they behaved differently in relation to the problems they face because they are better informed. Changes in this outcome could be achieved by addressing a whole range of issues of which providing better information is only one part. This reflects the difficult nature of measurements of outcome and the necessity to build this sort of initiative into a wider performance management framework which links it to other initiatives trying to deliver improvements in this area.

South Wiltshire Community Web - supporting local communities

[http://www.southwilts.com]

The South Wiltshire Community Web was developed as a result of a series of community planning workshops which were held to identify local community projects that would help address the broad priorities identified in Salisbury's community plan. The aim was to make local people more aware of the services and facilities on offer to them using a website whose pages are created and maintained by local community and voluntary groups and local businesses. It has been developed in support of a policy of community regeneration. The site was developed in consultation with a range of potential users so that the final site reflected their requirements.

Measuring performance
The current focus is on promoting the website in order to achieve target numbers of community sites on line and to increase the number of visitors accessing the site. Beyond this it will be possible to measure how actively community groups are using the site to assess its general health. The site has an on-line consultation tool and the business manager leading the project wants to make use of this to try and set some further service delivery measures to better evaluate the impact of the site – for example to assess whether it has strengthened awareness and links between local communities.

As the project is part of the framework set up to move forward the implementation of the local community plan priorities, assessment of its achievement will form part of the overall review of progress in achieving the community plan aims.

St Albans City and District Council - citizenship and e-democracy

St Albans City and District Council has focused on looking at strengthening local democracy using new technology. There were two main areas of work – the first involving two e-voting pilots and the second working with young people and children in local schools to increase their interest in the local political process.

Research with focus groups and using a residents' survey had indicated that e-voting would be well received and also showed that young people were interested in modern voting methods, better information on issues and candidates and also in using more interactive ways of participating in the process.

The council ran two initiatives with young people. One used online opinion polling aimed at older primary school children and involved the use of a secure website used by the children to express their views by poll. The second initiative was aimed at six formers and involved a mock-up of interactive e-elections with the young people setting up their own political parties to stand on the issues they identified as well as taking part in the e-voting. In both cases the web-based work was only part of the initiative and also involved working with the young people in schools to engage, inform and involve them.

Measuring performance

Measuring the success of the e-voting pilots was relatively straight forward using the numbers of people voting (compared to previous local elections) and the percentage that chose to poll electronically. They also used an exit poll survey to get information on ease of use and how well informed people felt by the public education campaign.

Measuring the success of their work with young people is more difficult. It was possible to measure the number of people accessing the e-mock elections site and the number of people voting but these measures are not really meaningful. Focus group based research could be used to get information about the perceived quality of the process from the young people's perspective. A key operational measure would be an increase in the number of 18 year olds registering to vote. Having an impact on this will take sustained work over some years.

5. Moving towards best practice

5.1 Where local authorities are now

Most councils are at the early stages

We found that most councils were at best at the very early stages of establishing the link between e-government and performance management. Even councils with well-established systems for managing performance often had e-government programmes that had evolved very separately from their performance management process.

Getting it right is not easy

Getting e-government properly integrated into a performance management system isn't a simple process. One council we spoke to had started out by simply making the delivery of their complete e-government programme a key priority within their performance management system. When they came to monitor progress they then found this difficult to do. They realised that e-government itself was not a true organisational priority and that it was in fact just a label for a set of projects throughout the council that had a common theme of making use of new technology. The council is now looking at moving away from using the broad e-government label in their performance management system and instead is starting to define e-government projects in terms of real organisational priorities - such as improving customer service. This will allow them to set appropriate performance measures and targets and allow them to monitor progress against true organisational priorities.

Managers leading performance management in councils and managers leading on e-government can have very different perspectives. A council e-champion commented that 'e-government has had to be driven by people who have seen its potential. Policy tends not to drive things that are new and novel.' In the same council the manager responsible for policy reflected that ' There is a lot of alienation and mystification around what the technology is and what it does. It has felt like a specialism and something that has been done to us.' While the new, innovative and unproven will continue to have its place, e-government is now more well established and it is time to start to integrate it properly with the delivery of organisational priorities. Leaders of e-government programmes and policy managers will need to work together to achieve this.

Performance management is itself relatively new to some authorities and is not consistently well established. Nor is it easy or quick to establish. The manager responsible for policy in one council, recognised for its effective performance management, highlighted the dilemmas very well 'It (performance management) all sounds perfectly holistic and rational but large beaurocracies actually function in irrational ways. Our performance management framework is really a set of component parts

that have grown organically rather than a unified and deliberate architecture. We are moving in the right direction step by step.'

5.2 Where authorities want to get to

This guide is about a new focus for e-government programmes. The focus has been on developing a vision for the potential of e-government, establishing its leadership and developing the infrastructure to deliver it. The focus now needs to on the integration of e-government into councils' processes for managing performance as a part of the ongoing process of improvement.

Integrating e-government with performance management
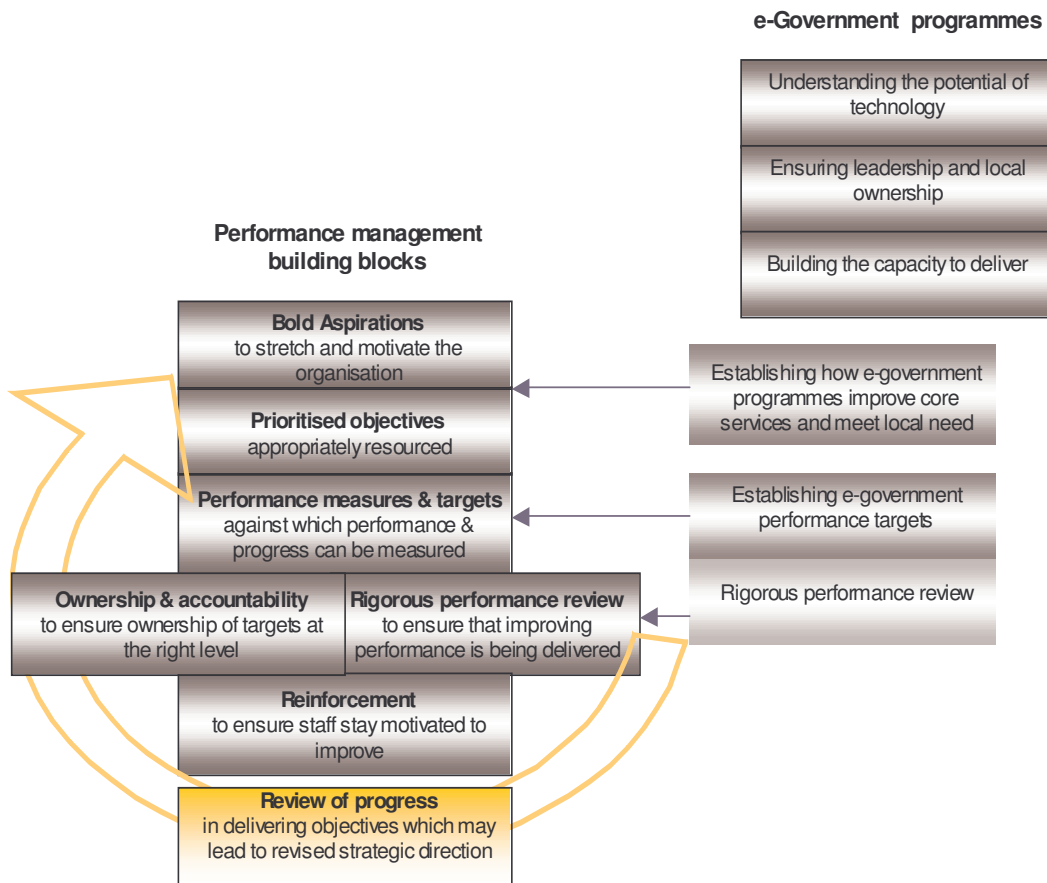
5.3 Moving forward

Below are some simple recommendations to help you to move forward and link your website and broader e-government programme with performance management at the policy and service levels.

Link in at the policy level

- Understand and use whatever framework your organisation uses for performance management, flowing from the community and corporate objectives.

- Build bridges with the manager responsible for policy in your council and work with them to plan how your website and broader e-government programme can be best be established as joined up with and complementary to policy work.

- Establish how your website and broader e-government programme link to your key organisational priorities and start the process of building website initiatives as objectives within the performance management framework.

Link in at a service level

- Work with business managers who are aware of the potential of e-government to support them in heading up web-based initiatives that are linked to the delivery of service level priorities.

- Use the web cleverly and concentrate on initiatives for which websites have a recognised impact in high priority areas for your council.

- Adopt a performance management mindset for every website and e-government initiative and express what you are trying to achieve in terms of service objectives, priorities and performance measures.

Establish performance measurement

- Think about what you want to measure and the type of performance measure you could use at the beginning of an initiative - this will help ensure you can collect the data you need and gives you a chance to establish before and after measures.

- Try to include some measures of website impact beyond simple usage.

- Use performance measures to review progress and impact.

- Don't forget that councillors and managers will want to be convinced that you are having an impact.