

Part 3

Dealing with citizens and local authorities - the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions

3.1 The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (hereafter DTLR) was created in June 2001 in the Whitehall reorganisation following the general election. Previously its administrative groups formed the major part of the Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions. The main change made in the reorganisation was that environment responsibilities were moved across to the separate Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. DTLR's remit is primarily within England, and our focus here is on the department centre, excluding the major executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies which it also supervises. We examine: the department's e-government strategy; DTLR's policies designed to promote e-government within local authorities; the existing stage of development of local government Web sites; and our conclusions and recommendations. (Appendix B provides more background on the organisation of DTLR for readers unfamiliar with it).

The development of e-government in the Department

3.2 The department has developed its e-business strategy and submitted it to the Office of the e-Envoy in two rounds. The first was completed in 2000 and the second in autumn 2001, somewhat later than other departments because of the extensive changes in DTLR's make-up following the General Election in June 2001 and the subsequent machinery of government changes. The strategy emphasises making information and transaction services available via its Web site in an accessible and customer-focused way. A major project is under way to put in place an electronic document and records management system, which is due to go live in January 2004. The DTLR centre (commonly known as DTLR(C)) envisages being able to deliver electronically information requested by the public under the Freedom of Information legislation, when it is activated for Whitehall, which may not be until 2004-5 now. As a policy-making and service delivery organisation DTLR(C) also sets store on developing an effective knowledge management system. It already operates an Intranet (called Infonet) and is developing core staff skills needed to fully benefit from the Intranet and the Web site. The department has been one of the leaders in developing 'electronic communities of interest' across Whitehall and has an electronic briefing system in place, which links to the government's wider 'knowledge network'. It also places a lot of emphasis upon the development of partnership relations with external agencies and communities that the department is centrally concerned with. A key recent development has been the 'Info4localgovernment' e-mail alerting service. People who register their interest in one or more aspects of local government are thereafter automatically updated about Web page references giving new policy announcements or departmental publications. The service was well launched with effective publicity in the local government press during 2001 and it now has 13,000 subscribers. (In comparison the much more heavily funded UK Online Web site, run by the Office of the e-Envoy as a whole-of-government portal, has been operating for longer and has 40,000 people registered).

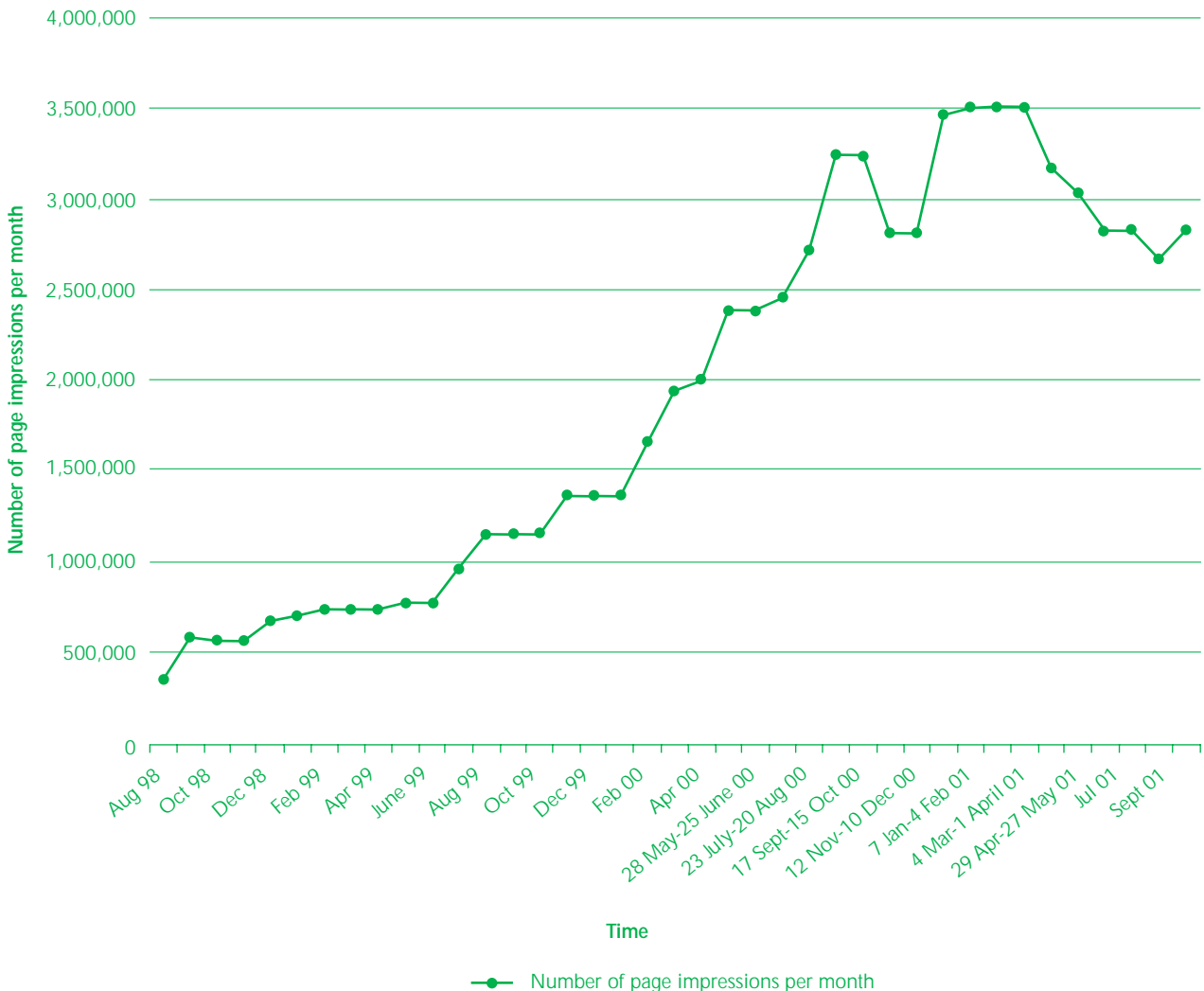


3.3 The department's external Web site is at www.dtlr.gov.uk. Because of the government reorganisation this name is not yet established with citizens at large, as the previous www.detr.gov.uk address was just beginning to be. Although the old 'DETR' name still diverts to the new 'DTLR' one, a key problem of adopting site names using initials is that they go completely out of date if departments are renamed, a fairly frequent occurrence in Whitehall. Users who type in more intuitive names, such as www.transport.gov.uk or www.localgovernment.gov.uk or www.regions.gov.uk will get nowhere. The department has historically made very limited use of Web aliases, unlike some other government sites such as the Number 10 Downing Street site. However, the department Webmaster has pursued an active policy of ensuring that the site is visible to the private sector commercial search engines, an important issue now that many new sites take time to be recognised. This approach has repaid dividends with high public

visibility. Research by the DTLR Web team on the search terms which lead to users accessing their site has shown that people reach it using many different words. The best-used phrase typed in was 'Highway Code', which all new driving test candidates must master.

3.4 The department's Web site has consistently been one of the most used central government sites. **Figure 9** shows that its overall usage grew strongly in the DETR period from under 500,000 page impressions a month in 1998 to over seven times as many in April 2001. After the machinery of government changes after the General Election in June 2001 when, amongst other changes, responsibility for Environmental protection transferred from DETR to Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, accesses to the DTLR site have been about a fifth lower than before. But there are signs that recent traffic is recovering its previous upward trend. In comparisons with other government Web sites the DETR/DTLR site has consistently ranked around third in

9 The growth of Web traffic on www.detr.gov.uk (up to May 2001) and on www.dtlr.gov.uk thereafter, number of page impressions



terms of the volume of page impressions. With more than 3.5 million page impressions a month DETR was a major government site. Even after the environment-related traffic moved away, DTLR still has a very substantial site with more than 2.9 million page impressions monthly.

environment topics were attracting relatively more click-throughs from citizens rather than from businesses. But overall, even in its new manifestation the DTLR site gets a majority of its traffic overnight and at weekends - in fact 64 per cent of all accesses occur outside office hours.

3.5 Looking at the breakdown of the DTLR traffic across time-bands in **Figure 10** shows that there is not a stark contrast between office hours accesses and those at other times (unlike HM Customs and Excise). The transition to the DTLR site has apparently opened up a larger and more consistent gap between office hours and out-of-hours accesses, perhaps suggesting that the

3.6 The foundations of this successful operation were laid in early 2000 when the department convened a team to study how they should respond to the first NAO *Government on the Web* report. This body concluded that DETR (as it then was) should upgrade its Web management provision. A professionally qualified Web Manager was recruited and took charge of a Web site

10 The growth of Web traffic on www.detr.gov.uk (up to May 2001) and thereafter on www.dtlr.gov.uk in different time bands, in page impressions



team with seven staff, a budget for contract processing of HTML materials and a development budget for the site. The Web manager established a training course tailored for staff in the main DTLR(C) groupings, which would allow them to create pages suitable for the department's Web site. Some 60 staff took up the training but only five have used their skills in providing content for the site. In addition, five executive officers work full time on Web publishing within the main policy divisions. A system of priorities for Web publication was established, with the Web team and contractors undertaking more complex work outside the scope of content providers' competences. The central team managed the Web site carefully to ensure its overall integrity. There are currently around 50,000 files on the site. DTLR's site is not strikingly designed but it is serviceable and gives a good overall picture of the department's activities. It provides citizens and businesses with a wealth of useful information.

3.7 The DTLR Web site operation is well costed, shown in **Figure 11**, and accounts for just under £0.5 million, around two thousandths of DTLR(C)'s overall running costs. In addition, however, the department also has an Electronic Publishing Strategy Unit with three staff (costing £140,000 annually) and a pump-priming fund of £250,000 to finance innovations in electronic publishing over three years, giving costs per year of £390,000 for this aspect. A team of seven staff maintains the DTLR Intranet (called Infonet) at an annual cost of £185,000 and with a development budget of £90,000 over three years, giving a cost per year of £275,000. Thus the overall Internet-orientated spending by DTLR amounts to just over £1 million a year, or around 0.4 per cent of DTLR(C)'s running costs.

3.8 Some features of the department's external Web site could be improved. Under DETR the home page was quite baffling or onerous for citizens to use, simply because of the extended range of the department's responsibilities. A modest redesign of the site and the reduction of functions under DTLR have eased this problem considerably. But the current site does not have a very effective search engine. It contains very few audio files for downloading and few non-English facilities (mostly in Welsh concerning some UK-wide responsibilities of the department). DTLR has central responsibility for urban policy and the problems of non-English speaking ethnic minorities have recently been in the forefront of discussion about the causes of riots in some towns of northern England. There are a few video files on the site (of various departmental TV campaign advertisements). Nor has DTLR yet developed any facilities for selling materials via the Web site. However, there are many document and form downloads freely available. No information on the site is presented in a way which lets users select or personalise the information they receive. Material is overwhelmingly set out in a listwise way. For instance,

people cannot yet input their postcodes and just see material which relates to their locality, such as information about the performance of their local councils. This approach contrasts sharply with the much more accessible style of the leading private sector content aggregator, www.upmystreet.com which gives its users quite a comprehensive view of their locality based on their postcode. Ironically this commercial site relies heavily on public sector information which is not effectively aggregated inside government at present. Finally the statistical information about the DTLR site and its usage was pretty basic until the summer of 2001 when the Webmaster made new hosting arrangements which included better use of the same analysis software. The information on Web traffic played back to the main groupings within the department has historically been rather minimal. But new research is being undertaken to ensure that user behaviours are properly analysed and fully taken into account in a forthcoming major redesign of the site planned for 2002.

11 DTLR expenditure on its external Web site in 2000-01

Expenditure category	Cost in £
Web team (8 staff)	243,100
Content providers in groupings (equivalent to 5 FTEs)	133,400
Web site hosting and development costs	104,000
Total Web site costs	480,500

NOTES

1. The numbers do not include a share of central costs for staff involved.
2. Numbers are rounded to the nearest hundred.



3.9 The department now clearly identifies its Web site and associated e-government operations as one of several first-rank means of communicating both with citizens at large and with businesses, local governments and a wide range of non-governmental organisations active in the regional, planning, housing, urban policy and transport fields. Both the Web site and the Intranet teams have recently begun to be run within the Communications division. Their management lines of responsibility and budgets are well-specified and linked closely to the development of the overall e-business strategy. The 'next generation' Web site arrangements and the introduction of content management software should make it easier for content providers within DTLR(C) to produce materials for the site, and for the central teams to manage that information. The department believes that the new site will be a major step forward, enabling it to make better use of its information assets and fully meet its e-government targets. There is appropriate and regular top management and ministerial attention to e-government issues. Two areas where perhaps DTLR(C) should focus more in future are: first, developing its own Internet-based information services, rather than focusing primarily on the services being developed by its agencies; and second, persuading managers in the main headquarters groupings to let their staff acquire sufficient training in new media skills, rather than there being a permanent shortfall in such provision.

Departmental policy for encouraging e-government amongst local authorities

3.10 The importance of local government in achieving overall improvement in the performance of the public sector was recognised in the Modernising Government white paper of spring 1999, which also emphasised that 'information age' government was as relevant for councils as for central agencies. The Local and Regional Government group within DTLR(C) has primary responsibility for this area of policy. Its 'local government Online' campaign has a very broad remit. It covers not just the Web-based provision of services directly to citizens but also the Web-enabling and better networking of councils' back-office systems, the provision of Web-enabled call centres and one-stop shops, improvements in e-access, the development of e-democracy initiatives, cultural changes in councillors' and local authority staff attitudes, and e-procurement. The department provides around four fifths of the funding available to local authorities in the form of an annual block grant. In addition it regularly top-slices amounts of money off this substantial sum to be used to encourage local authorities to pursue particular initiatives or innovations which ministers believe can improve the overall effectiveness of the local government sector. The department also plays a role in establishing and supervising the legal framework within which local government operates and in setting performance

standards against which local authorities performance is judged by the Audit Commission. And its research and advice are widely influential within the sector. In recent years DTLR has stressed the importance of partnership with local authorities. It has tried to tone down earlier overtly directive ways of operating, in favour of bringing a consensus of local authority opinion along behind its initiatives, especially the modernising government agenda. Hence DTLR tends to avoid being directly prescriptive on detailed operational matters. It seeks to make more initiatives jointly with local government bodies, especially the influential Local Government Association (LGA) which represents all councils, and its subsidiary the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) which has been asked by the LGA to lead on the implementation of e-government. IDeA is expected to provide a focus for working with local e-champions, co-ordinating resources within local government on a national scale, promoting and sharing ideas and best practice, and taking forward key national initiatives for councils. The Audit Commission inspects local authorities' management and operations to ensure that they are delivering 'best value' for local citizens, and publishes regular reports on how councils are doing. (National Inspectorates answering to other Whitehall departments additionally cover particular policy areas relevant for local government).

3.11 Within this overall apparatus e-government issues are a relatively recent addition to DTLR's policy aims. Funding of £350 million has been secured from the Treasury for encouraging local authorities to develop their Internet presence, to make services available on line and to meet the government's wider definition of 'electronic' provision, which includes telephone call centres or one-stop shops where these are backed by IT support. The money forms part of the department's Spending Review settlement for 2001-4. It is linked to one component of the Public Service Agreement which sets DTLR a target of getting all (100 per cent of) local government services available electronically by 2005. Another PSA target requires the department to secure annual improvements in the efficiency of local government of 2 per cent a year in the review period. The £350 million will be spent over the three years 2001-4, mostly in the last two years. Just under half, £160 million, will be spent in the form of fixed parcels of money delivered to each local authority, not varying in response to their population size, local needs or detailed performance. However, councils must submit a planning document in a form which DTLR sees as satisfactory (see next paragraph). This element of funding is heavily biased towards small district councils, mainly in rural areas, which have a relative lack of e-government capacity in the department's view. The remaining monies will be spent on encouraging the development of particular technologies or solutions; on national projects which are designed to provide 'building blocks' that can subsequently be taken up by any council; and on encouraging councils to work in local or sub-regional IT partnerships.

3.12 The main departmental policy tools for ensuring that this money is well spent are closely modelled on the procedures used within central government by the Office of the e-Envoy. Councils were asked to appoint e-champions at officer level (achieved by six out of seven authorities in July 2001) and at member level (achieved by three in four councils by the same date). As a condition of securing funding, a circular to local authorities in April 2001 asked them to prepare an 'Implementing Electronic Government' (IEG) statement and to submit it by the summer to the department. After delays in some cases, all local authorities in England did submit IEG statements. These plans went to the Modernising Local Government teams within DTLR, which consists principally of staff seconded to the department from local authorities. The department judged two thirds of the IEG statements as satisfactory, but felt that nearly three in every ten statements were satisfactory while none the less having 'significant weaknesses which were drawn to authorities' attention'. A small number of councils (25) were asked to revise their whole plans and resubmit them in response to DTLR feedback. The April 2001 circular promised that a national e-government strategy document for local authorities in England would be produced in September 2001, but it is now planned for April 2002.

3.13 The main way in which DTLR will find out about the state of local government's efforts on e-government is through a Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) number. This indicator closely follows the design of the Office of e-Envoy's performance monitoring index, which asks central departments to enumerate their main interactions with citizens and then to count what proportion of these interactions are capable of being completed electronically (see Part 4). In the same way, BVPI 157 asks councils to identify the services they transact or information they exchange with the public, and then to count how many of these in each year are electronically enabled. Thus if a council distinguishes say 40 interactions, of which 24 are enabled, it will rate its overall target attainment at 60 per cent. How councils enumerate their transactions and declare them either enabled, partly enabled or not enabled is largely up to them. They will have to justify their counting procedures as part of the normal audit and inspection rounds. The Audit Commission has issued some guidance for BVPI 157 (in Newsletter 20) in agreement with the DTLR. This advice concentrates on clarifying what is meant by 'the public' and it does not specify which services should be included. Authorities have the discretion to split up the elements of their services for BVPI 157 purposes as they see fit. So it seems unlikely that consistent results will be obtained. For this indicator each transaction also counts the same as every other, no matter how large or small are the number of dealings with citizens or local enterprises involved. There are no other DTLR performance indicators relating to e-government issues, so BVPI 157 carries the whole load. As yet neither DTLR nor the Audit Commission

collect any information about the volume of Web traffic on council Web sites or the actual usage of Web sites or take-up of electronic services across local authorities.

3.14 In devising their policies for encouraging local authorities DTLR seems to have been conspicuously short of systematic information. Staff from the Modernising Local Government team have consulted widely with local councils and given advice. They have also sought to extract lessons from the initiatives and innovations made by the more pioneering councils. But their observations are somewhat scattered and have not been aggregated or developed into any well-developed model of how local governments are setting about e-government developments, and what the main drivers for change or barriers to development may be in this setting. Pulling in the first round of IEG statements has created a stock of knowledge about each council's e-government stance for the department. But it was not clear to us how much systematic information could be extracted from these plans. The DTLR's research division went out to tender in early 2002 for a project to explore the influences shaping councils' e-government policies. If well-handled the project may produce useful information by mid 2003.

3.15 The Department has also gained insights from competitive processes fostering local innovation. The Beacon Councils scheme provides extra funds to authorities which can demonstrate the excellence or innovation of their service provision, and six councils were supported for developing 'accessible services' provision in 2001. The department also funded 25 local government on-line 'pathfinder' schemes in particular councils, where authorities have been awarded extra funding to develop particular implementations of electronic services in ways which it is hoped will then be easily copied by other local authorities. This scheme aims to avoid 'reinventing the wheel' and is still in its early days. Its prospects for success are hampered by the quite high level of fragmentation of IT systems in local government, both across different policy sectors and across around 400 established private sector suppliers. Most local government IT systems are supplied to particular directorates within an authority. Only a few councils (like Liverpool) have integrated the running of their IT contracts with one company.

3.16 The Department has little reliable or systematic information available about the state of development of local authority Web sites. One valuable source of information has been *Better Connected*, an annual publication from Socitm (the Society for Information Technology Management). It is based on an appraisal of each local authority's Web site by a group of experts. They look in depth at a set of situations where citizens might want to find information or conduct transactions on-line. Socitm have analysed their results using the stages model discussed in Part 1 (see paragraphs 1.12 to

1.15) and give a synoptic overall 'grade' for each council Web site. The *Better Connected* reports have run for four years now and provide a useful framework against which to measure progress. In 1999 the Socitm team concluded that local authority sites were predominantly basic and brochureware. In 2000 they found that more substantial electronic publishing was beginning. And in 2001 the survey found that a few local government sites now displayed interactive features and the ability to do a number of transactions on line: one locality was graded as transactional overall. The reports are sold as part of a general Socitm subscription and copies go to the vast majority of local authorities. The Socitm surveys are widely quoted and seen as useful. Some staff in the local councils we visited for this study queried the ratings of their own authority and argued that the evaluations made were too subjective.

3.17 The Audit Commission as yet has no systematic information on the stage of e-government development across local authorities, and has not given advice to local authorities about how to ensure value for money in this area. However, the Commission began work on e-government issues in the spring of 2001. The project focuses on three key issues: why e-government matters; how well councils are positioned to deliver; and how they can move forwards. The Commission team consulted with local authority and other stakeholders in December 2001 on their preliminary ideas. It published a briefing paper on its initial results in February 2002, and intends to issue a national report in July.

The development of local government on the Web

3.18 To fill this information gap we undertook a census of all local government Web sites in England, seeking to collect objective information on which facilities were and were not already available to citizens. We drew up a list of questions about possible features of the sites which are feasible now, and indeed are being provided

on at least some local sites. We talked with the Local Government Association, Socitm, the Audit Commission and DTLR officials about this coding frame. We also visited seven local authorities of different sizes and types to gain an understanding of how Web-based service development happen on the ground. We looked at a large number of sites to see where the boundaries of good practice now lay. The coding frame which emerged from this process formed the core of our study. (It is available for free download on the Web at www.governmentontheweb.org, which also gives the basic results for each question). We used a team of post-graduate researchers from the London School of Economics to code up to 172 variables about each site. The census method is also described in Appendix A on page 67 below, but it is worth noting here that our coders were experts in understanding Web sites. They were looking for a huge range of features which they knew how to recognise. They spent a long time on each site, around 1 to 1.5 hours, and their approach was carefully cross-checked. So our methodology was deliberately generous to local authorities in recording whether features were present or not. An average citizen, accessing the same site for a very short time and untrained in public sector Web design, would have a much smaller chance of finding any given feature than did our coders.

3.19 **Figure 12** shows that all but 13 local authorities in England did have a Web site in November 2001. In all 375 council sites were found. Different categories of council cover different service mixes. Counties and districts divide local service functions between them in much of more rural England, but unitary and metropolitan authorities handle all local service for their areas. (Some strategic transport and other functions are handled at the London-wide or metropolitan level). The use of Web sites is considerably better developed amongst councils than that amongst central government agencies taken as a whole. It reflects the fact that every local authority has multiple direct dealings with citizens, firms and many non-governmental organisations in its locality.

12 Local authority sites surveyed in the census of English local authorities

Type of authority	With Web sites	No Web site	Percentage with sites	Main responsibilities
District councils	227	10	96	Local planning, environmental services, tax collection, leisure services
Unitary authorities	45	2	96	All services
Metropolitan councils	36	0	100	All local services
County councils	34	1	97	Education, libraries, social services, highways, public transport, strategic planning
London boroughs (and City)	33	0	100	All local services
Total authorities	375	13	97	

NOTE

One council did have a site address but the site was still 'under construction'. It is counted as no site here.

In addition the survey established that council Web sites are highly visible. When the formal name of the local authority was entered in full into the search engine Google nearly all sites came up listed first, and over nine tenths did so on the MSN search facility - an excellent performance. Most council sites also have intuitive names, which have a good chance of being guessed by local citizens. However, a considerable minority of councils use either hard to guess abbreviations or 'insider' initials which are non-intuitive. Some councils with basically intuitive names have unnecessary dashes or stops in their site addresses, which are calculated to render their sites hard to find if citizens try to type the names into their browsers without using a search engine. Similarly off-putting are added acronyms which citizens are not likely to use, like DC for district council.

3.20 The main outlines of the census findings are shown in detail in **Figure 13**, differentiated by the extent to which facilities are present on local authority Web sites and by service area. We group general site features together with citizenship and revenue features; the 'human services' areas cover education, libraries, leisure services and social services; and the 'urban or environmental services' span across planning, housing, highways, public transport, environmental health and waste. The basic patterns which emerge show that general and citizenship features are most widely distributed, closely followed by the human services area, but that the urban services lag a long way behind in the presence of features. In addition, local authority sites are quite diverse. There are very few features which are present on most council sites - such as the ability to find the names of councillors and wards, and an A to Z of council services. Even features like a press release section or a description of the council's current activities are present only two thirds of the time. However, half of the library authorities provide on-line public access to their catalogue of books, and somewhat fewer let citizens reserve or renew books on-line - the best disseminated electronic service we found. Just over a quarter of authorities let citizens pay their council tax on-line. Downloadable forms were hard to find, especially in some service areas that would seem tailor-made for such a facility, such as making planning applications (35 per cent), registering births, marriages and deaths (4 per cent) or applying to be on the electoral register (2 per cent). On-line submission of forms was even more rare, but around one in ten housing authorities were accepting repair notifications on-line. Anomalies abounded. For instance, 40 per cent of education authorities posted teaching job vacancies online, but only 10 per cent allowed application forms to be downloaded. One of the best-provided e-mail

facilities (included by three fifths of councils) was an option to comment on the authority's Best Value Performance Plan, an opening unlikely to be taken up by very many citizens. On the other hand, local government is clearly better than central government in providing some kinds of information. For instance more than half of the sites give e-mail addresses for senior officials.

3.21 The performance of local government sites in linking to other neighbouring public sector sites was in general poor. The chief bright spots here were that half of the council sites did include a link to the central government portal at www.ukonline.gov.uk and 60 per cent gave links to other neighbouring local authorities. In addition, 56 per cent of education authorities gave links to OFSTED and over two fifths to the National Grid for Learning. However, nearly three quarters of council sites had no contact information for NHS Direct and over two thirds none for the local Health Trust. Three fifths had no contact information for local police forces and over half none for any local MPs. Linkages to private sector sites were generally also poor or very poor - only one in twelve registrars for marriages gave contact information or links to hotels or other venues for marriage ceremonies, and only one in fifty registrars for deaths helped citizens to contact funeral directors. Little use was made of maps in helping citizens to find out which ward they were in, where school catchment areas were, or how to find council offices and facilities like schools, libraries and social services centres. The overwhelming preponderance of information was presented in a listwise, text-based form.

3.22 We constructed a number of indices showing how local authorities performed across the full range of facilities coded in our surveys, and in the three broad policy areas used above. The overall index in **Figure 14** was constructed by asking how many of 165 positive features coded in our census were present in each local authority site. The average score across all local authorities was 27 per cent, with the middle half of councils having scores between 34 per cent and 21 per cent. One in four councils had scores of 20 per cent or less, and a similar number rated 35 per cent or more. The only lower outliers doing very poorly were the 13 authorities with no Web site at all. There were 30 upper outliers doing exceptionally well however, with scores of 41 per cent or more. Two of the three top-scoring Web sites were London boroughs, Camden on 62 per cent and Brent on 56 per cent, with Lincolnshire County Council also achieving joint second with 56 per cent. A breakdown of this overall score across all 388 councils can be accessed on the Web at www.governmentontheweb.org.

13 Local Authority Features ranked by percentage and service group

Key

■ Basic site
 ■ Interactive
 ■ E-Publishing
 ■ Transactional
 ■ Account Management

General and revenue features		Human Services features		Environmental Services features	
Feature	%	Feature	%	Feature	%
Universal Over 90%					
Site listed in first place in Google search	98				
Consistent colour scheme	97				
Consistent size and style	97				
Logo branding	96				
Site listed in first place in MSN search	91				
Widespread 70-80%					
General enquiries email address	88	Details of school term dates	70		
Publishing of BVPI	85	A list of library addresses	70		
An AZ of council services	84				
Site listed in first place in Lycos search	79				
A general search facility for the site as a whole	76				
A list of the Council's departments sections or divisions	73				
Becoming widespread 50-69%					
Description of the council's current activities	67	Addresses of local leisure facilities	67	% of online rent payments made through Girobank	69
Press release section	67	Links to schools' own web sites	65		
Site was updated in the last week	64	Email addresses for schools	61		
Information on how to join the electoral register	54	Link to DFES	61		
Email addresses for senior officials	52	Link to other local authorities	60		
Link to UKOnline	51	List of local events	59		
IEG plan published	50	Link to OFSTED	56		
		List of local social services providers	54		
		Online enquiry facility for libraries	53		
		List of local adult education providers	52		
Significant 30-49%					
List of name and addresses of LEA schools	43	Online search of library catalogue	45	Link to railtrack.com	44
The Council's mission statement	42	Link to the National Grid for Learning	42	Facility to review a list of current planning applications	40
A list of local MP's names and addresses	42	Search facility for schools by catchment area	42	Link to DTLR	38
Council's opening times	41	List of teaching vacancies	41	Download forms for planning applications	34
A list of the council's functions	39	Facility to renew a library book online	38	A list of local road repairs	33
Email enquiry facility for electoral register enquiries	38	Facility to reserve a library book online	37		
The council's future strategy	37	Link to childcare link	31		

General and revenue features		Human Services features		Environmental Services features	
Feature	%	Feature	%	Feature	%
Significant 30-49% <i>continued</i>					
Online feedback facility for BVPI	37				
A what's new to the site section	37				
Email addresses for non-senior officials	36				
Link to local police authorities	30				
Few 10-29%					
Download a form to join the electoral register	28	A link to local theatres	27	Link to the Environment Agency	22
Report a street fault online	28	A list of local adult education courses	24	Links to other nonprofit environment agencies	21
A description of the council's legal responsibilities	28	Submit an online complaint about social services providers	24	Download bus timetables	20
Link to NHS Direct	27	A location map for local libraries	22	Conduct search for planning applications by dates	19
Council's address	26	Conduct search to find out about local events	19	Find bus journey through a searchable journey planner	19
MPs' email addresses	26	Address and telephone number of local theatre	19	Find train journey through a searchable journey planner	19
Pay council tax online	24	Link to local cinema	19	Send a detailed enquiry about bus journeys and prices	18
A section providing regular updates or news	21	Search for the addresses of local libraries	18	Download train timetables	18
Link to local health trust	20	Address and phone number of local cinema	13	Link to DEFRA	18
Surgery hours for wards	20	Map of school locations	12	Address and telephone number of local housing associations	15
Pay business rates online	20	Search for local social services providers	12	Submit online complaint form to environmental health	15
Council address and map	18	Search for location map of local libraries	12	Submit an online request to environmental health	15
Name and email address of councillors	18	Download application forms for teaching vacancies	10	Search for train fares using online search facility	14
Searchable name and email address of councillors	18	Search for adult education providers	10	Link to the trainline.com	13
List of MP's constituency boundaries	18			Address and telephone number of Citizens Advice Bureau	12
Link to the local fire service	16			Link to the Highways Agency	12
Link to Learning and Skills Council	16			Search for bus fares using online search facility	11
Link to Citizens Advice Bureau	16			Search for road repairs	11
Text only version of the site	16			Link to local housing associations	10
Website updated within last month	14			Link to nationalrail.co.uk	10
Details of MP's surgery hours	14				
Names and addresses of registry offices	13				
Name of electoral wards	12				
Search for the name and address of electoral wards	11				
Material in languages other than English	11				
Name and map of electoral wards	10				
Rare 0-9%					
Life events section	9	Location map of local adult education providers	9	Pay rent online	9
Link to crime reports	9	Search for adult education courses	9	Send detailed email enquiries about train times and fares	9
Address and phone number of local hotels	6	Link to teachernet	9	List of when household waste will be collected	7
Address and phone numbers of other Local Authorities	5	Download applications for adult education courses	9	List of housing available to rent	6
List of councillors' names	5	Make online applications for teaching vacancies	7	Search for planning applications using post code or street names	6
Facility to sign up for news letters to be sent by email	4	Download a form to complain about a social services provider	5	Address and phone number for national rail	6
Search to find electoral wards	4	Link to the people's network	5	Search for when household waste will be collected	6
Search to find councillors' names	4	Address and phone number for the DFES	5	Links to Countryside Commission	6
Report crimes online	4			Links to Environment Agency	6
				Address and phone number of the DTLR	5

General and revenue features		Human Services features		Environmental Services features	
Feature	%	Feature	%	Feature	%
Rare 0-9% continued					
Name and office map for the registry office	4	Address and phone number for the Learning and Skills Council	5	Download a form to apply for housing benefit	4
Download a form to register a birth	4	Address and phone number for OFSTED	4	Set up a direct debit to pay rent	4
Download a form to apply for a marriage licence	4	Search for school names and addresses	4	Address and phone number of the Land Registry	4
Download a form to register a death	4	Search for local adult education providers	4	Link to local estate agents	4
Address and phone numbers for places of worship	4	Address and phone for the National Grid for Learning	4	Buy bus tickets and travel cards online	4
Technology for users with special needs	4	Download application for social services	3	Buy train tickets and travel cards online	4
Pages carrying HM government crest	4	Download complaint form and complain on line to social services	3	Pay parking fines online	4
Useful search to find council's address and map	3	Search a map of local leisure facilities	3	Download form to apply for available housing	3
Search for constituency boundaries	3	Book a leisure facility online	3	Address and telephone number for the Highways Agency	3
Address and phone number of NHS direct	2	Request a service from social services online	3	Address and telephone number for DEFRA	3
Site updated within last 3 months	2	Apply for adult education courses	3	Address and telephone number for the Environment Agency	3
Site updated over 3 months ago	2	Apply for adult education courses and pay fees online	3	Search for name and addresses of housing offices	2
Search to find council address	2	Address and phone number of Adult Learning Inspectorate	1	Name and location map of housing office	2
Search of constituency boundaries	2	Link to Adult Learning Inspectorate	1	Search for available housing by location and accommodation type	2
Join electoral register online	2	Address and phone number for childcare link	1	Apply for housing benefit online	2
Search for name and addresses of registry offices	2			Download form and report road repairs	2
Address and phone numbers of Funeral Directors	2			Apply for available housing online	1
View business rates accounts online	2			View rent account details online	1
Download Audio files	2			Submit planning application online	1
Name and address of web manager	1			Address and telephone number of Land Registry	1
Facility to sign up for press releases to be received by email	1			Address and telephone number of local builders	1
MP's office details and location map	1			Address and telephone number of local architects	1
Search for local registry offices	1			Address and telephone number of local estate agents	1
Address and telephone number of florists	1			Address and telephone number of other travel companies	1
				Register for email alert about road repairs	1
				Download form to report road repairs	1
				Complain about missed household waste collections by downloading form or online	1
				Download form to request service from environmental health	1
				Address and telephone number for Countryside Commission	1
				Address and telephone number for English Nature	1

14 Average percentage scores for the presence of Web features on the sites of different types of local authority, November 2001

Type of Authority	All features	General Revenue features	Education /libraries/leisure/ social services features	Planning/ housing/ roads/transport/waste/ environmental health features
County councils	38	42	42	18
London boroughs	34	39	36	23
Metropolitan boroughs	31	43	32	17
Unitary authorities	28	39	25	16
District councils	23	31	22	14
All	27	35	30	16
<i>Number of features covered</i>	<i>165</i>	<i>76</i>	<i>38</i>	<i>52</i>

NOTES

Cell entries show the mean percentage score (actual features as a percentage of features coded for) - achieved by local authorities in each type.

We computed the score for each local authority for the presence of 166 Web features on their site, and then for three groups of these features. We then computed the average (mean) scores for all authorities within each type of local authority, for all the features and for each of the three sub-groups.

3.23 Looking across types of authorities the mean score for the 36 county councils was highest at 38 per cent, and that for district councils was lowest at 23 per cent. Most media commentary on Web provision tends to focus on larger urban councils, especially those which provide one or two high-profile transactional services. There are three possible explanations for counties' above average performance:

- they have a more limited range of services, which may lend itself more to on-line provision;
- counties are much larger authorities than district councils, especially the rural districts, and thus have a better resource base; and
- many counties made positive efforts to build stronger links to local citizens during the mid 1990s area reorganisations of local government, in order to ensure that they survived as a tier. These initiatives often included introducing an effective Web site, providing an early start for subsequent development of e-services.

Many of the district councils which were clearly lagging were small authorities, often in more rural areas. Metropolitan authorities and London boroughs and unitary authorities were all above the national average, but unitary authorities scored lower.

3.24 Looking at the different broad policy sectors covered by our coding scheme, the best-performing aspects of Web sites involved general site features, such as accessibility, general information about the council and citizenship, closely followed by libraries, education and leisure services - see [Figure 15](#). There was then a considerable gap with most other services scoring much less well than the national average for all site features. On

the worst service areas the average local authority was three times less likely to have the site features we coded for than in the best service areas - a wide variation.

3.25 Turning to the regional patterning of local authorities' performance, there is a clear gradient. The strongest area of e-government progress overall is in London, followed at a distance by the South East - see [Figure 16](#). Local authorities in other regions had somewhat fewer electronic features and facilities on their Web sites than the South East, but the regional differences were not marked except for regions with the lowest average scores, the North East and the West Midlands. This pattern may reflect patterns of PC ownership, and perhaps also the proportion of knowledge workers who are in the private sector, since this group is most likely to use e-services in their work and to make demands for e-services from their local councils.

3.26 The overall pattern of features on local authority Web sites underpins the argument in Part 1 about the importance of electronic publishing and interactive publishing as well as transactions. There is room for doubt that simple electronic processing of one-off transactions offers many advantages for local authorities. For instance, the ability to process council tax payments on-line and to accept credit card payments may offer some cost savings when compared with over-the-counter cash payments and perhaps compared with processing cheques sent by post. But the most successful local authorities at raising council tax are those which encourage citizens to take out direct debits, and some finance staff worry that one-off electronic payment may reduce the incentives for direct debiting. The most successful local e-tax service is thus likely to be one which ensures that people paying

15 Average percentage scores for all local authorities in England across different services areas, November 2001

Service area	Mean score (%)	Number of features coded
General site features	35	70
Libraries	34	8
Education	32	20
Leisure services	27	6
All services	27	166
Highways	19	6
Public transport	19	16
Social services	18	4
Environmental services	15	7
Revenue	13	6
Planning	13	9
Waste collection	11	2
Housing services	9	12

on-line (perhaps because they have recently moved into an area) are followed up quickly and appropriately incentivised to complete a direct debit. Similarly, because direct debits are very low cost to administer once they are in place, it is not clear how many citizens will want to inspect and manage their council tax accounts on-line. Careful market segmentation is likely to be needed to ascertain that overall cost savings can be achieved through investing in this area.

- 3.27 The greatest potential for local government services on the Web arises from the fact that unitary councils especially deal with many different services, and ones which citizens will tend to use and reuse in a short time period. Central government agencies are inherently single function bodies, which citizens will out of necessity visit infrequently. For instance someone who completes a passport application on-line may not need to return to the Passport Agency site again for a decade. Thus citizens accessing central government sites are permanently likely to know little about how the sites are organised or what issues are involved in their interactions with the agency. They will usually have to start from scratch each time. In addition, users will have little possibility of learning more about central government e-services in other areas, of doing 'collateral learning', unless the government portal can attract users' attention on the way into an agency's site. By contrast, citizens logging on to good local government sites, which provide a wide range of electronic services and information, may know a great deal more about how things are organised at local level. And they may be able to do collateral learning more

16 The average scores for the presence of Web features, across all local authorities within the Government Regions for England, November 2001

Government region	Mean score in percent
Greater London	34
South East	29
Eastern	27
Yorkshire and Humberside	27
England as a whole	27
South West	26
North West	26
East Midlands	25
West Midlands	23
North East	23

NOTES

We computed the score for each local authority for the presence of 166 Web features on their site. We then computed the average (mean) score for all authorities within each government region.

easily. For instance, someone may look up a routine matter on the council's site, like which kind of recycling materials are being collected in a given week, or checking a bus timetable. But they may then notice on the council's home page that a local planning consultation affecting their area is under way, or find out that further education courses are registering for the new year.

- 3.28 If local authority sites develop across-the-board facilities to provide information about their services and their areas they can be much more visible than sites for any central agency. If they also grow links to local business, community organisations and leisure facilities (for things like cinemas, theatres, music venues and entertainment), then the chances improve that council home pages will be included in many more citizens' lists of 'favourites' or 'bookmarks'. The overall usefulness of a site is also critical for either word-of-mouth dissemination or 'viral' marketing. Local authority sites with properly organised and developed links pages could also become crucial local portals by which citizens would access public sector agencies as a whole. At present this potential is still in embryo. It is disturbing that half of councils do not even link to www.UKOnline.gov.uk yet. Neither the Office of the e-Envoy nor DTLR see it as feasible to restrict government funding for local e-government to those local authority Web sites carrying a UK Online link, as a quid pro quo for funding. But the longer term potential for local authority sites to provide key windows into the whole public sector is considerable.

3.29 These findings have great resonance for policy-making by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on encouraging e-government by local authorities. They first of all establish a useful bottom-line against which progress in future years may be more precisely gauged. The data already suggest that there are a few areas where the 2005 target for all local public services to be electronically available is likely to be well met, given current progress - such as public library catalogues on-line. There are other areas where progress so far has been rather slow, but where a one-off transaction capacity should be in place in most areas, given the emphasis of current central government and DTLR policy - such as paying council tax on-line. But there are many other areas, especially in the fields of information-giving and interactive presentation of materials, where progress to date has been almost non-existent and where central government backing and support has not been prominent. The overall low scores for local authorities in our census suggest the importance of councils pursuing electronic publication strategies which are systematic and comprehensive, and which maximise the market reach and appeal of the local authority 'brand' as a whole.

Conclusions and recommendations

3.30 The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has a reasonably effective and well managed external Web site which plays an important role in its overall communications strategy and which has been sensibly budgeted and allocated funds for development. The Web site has attracted a good numbers of users and shows fairly buoyant trends over time. The department centre's main electronic service functions focus on information provision and exchanges and it has a consistent policy in place. There are plans for a redesign of the Web site in 2002 and for progress to be made in electronic records and document management. DTLR also has an Intranet and has made some investment in innovations in electronic publishing.

3.31 DTLR still has a long way to go in developing its site to its full potential, especially in presenting information more interactively and in closely analysing and responding to users' behaviour and needs. The department could find it helpful to examine how its communication budget is split across conventional and new media. It needs to be able to show that its current split with relatively small resources devoted to new media and Internet-based efforts is the most cost-effective one. Existing innovations, such as the 'Info4localgovernment' service, are a useful start, but they should be extended and improved.

3.32 On promoting e-government for local councils the department believe that the IEG statements and funding made available, along with the introduction of BVPI 157, have encouraged councils to develop services online. DTLR judge that local government is making good progress towards ensuring that 25 per cent of services are capable of being delivered electronically by 2002. In their view the BVPI 157 performance indicator has encouraged authorities to categorise how they interact with the public across all their services. Councils have moved to identify and improve their state of readiness in relation to the 2005 target of 100 per cent services availability in one 'electronic' form or another (either online, or via E-enabled call centres or one-stop shops).

3.33 Yet we found that policy-making on encouraging e-government amongst local authorities has so far been based on remarkably little systematic information. A substantial amount of specific, targeted funding will be committed to promoting local authority efforts in this area, over the next two years particularly. The department's existing main performance indicator, the

BVPI 157 measure, cannot produce consistent information on how much effective progress is being made. Even if service availability in electronic form could be better measured, what surely matters are the take-up levels of available local e-services and facilities by citizens or enterprises. The apparatus of IEG statements also produces discursive information which it is not easy to analyse.

3.34 As current policy stands, we conclude that the department has insufficient information in place or in prospect to be able to offer Parliament assurance that the funding being committed (£350 million in all over three years) will be productively and appropriately spent. We recommend that:

- The department should develop measures for regularly and systematically monitoring how local government Internet-based services are developing, and regularly review policy in the light of the findings. Our census of Web sites shows that low cost techniques for doing so are readily available. Broader aspects of 'local government online' initiatives may also need to be monitored.
- DTLR should discuss and develop with local government bodies one or several performance indicators for measuring the actual take-up of local government on-line services, which can be put in place as soon as possible to supplement or replace BVPI 157.
- After appropriate discussions with stakeholders, and consistent with its approach to encouraging more freedom for local authority decisions, the department should formulate and put in place feasible broad targets for local governments to increase usage of their electronic services continuously over time and especially by 2005. Local authorities should be given appropriate formal indications of central government's priorities for services to be provided electronically and of achievements to aim for in different policy sectors.
- The department should deliver to Parliament a systematic 'end of term' report in 2005 on the measures taken to promote better e-government and electronic service provision amongst local authorities. It should set out objectively the successes achieved and the areas of less progress. And it should estimate the likely benefits put in place against the funding costs incurred by central government and implementation costs by local authorities.



In Part Four:

The role of the Office of e-Envoy (OeE)

Progress on some key OeE initiatives to provide central facilities for e-government

The targets regime and performance indicators used by the Office of the e-Envoy to monitor policy implementation

How far central government departments and agencies have developed their Web sites and Web traffic

Our main conclusions and recommendations on central policies