

Participants

Neil Bacon, founder and Chairman, iWantGreatCare.org

Sureyya Cansoy, Associate Director - public sector work programme, Intellect

Katharine Davidson, Implementation Team, Conservative Party

Lord Erroll, Parliamentary IT Committee

Nigel Gibbons, CEO, Unitech

Michael Hepburn, Hepburn Communications

Dr Andy Hopkirk, Director of the NCC's e-Government Interoperability Framework programme

James Kirkland, Corporate Networks Manager, New Local Government Network

Bill McCluggage, Deputy Government CIO

Stephen McGibbon, Microsoft Regional Technology Officer for Europe

Andrew Miller MP, Chair, Parliamentary IT Committee

Paul Morris, Head of Government Affairs, Microsoft

Giampiero Nanni, Director – Interoperability, Microsoft

Lindsay Roy MP, PPS to Tessa Jowell as Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General

Gisela Stuart MP, Editor, The House Magazine

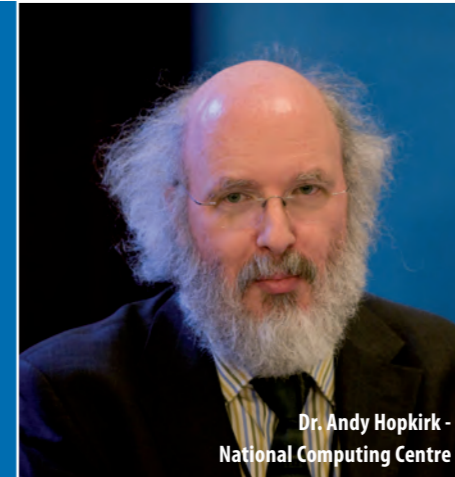
Jenny Willott MP, Liberal Democrat Shadow Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster



Paul Morris of Microsoft discusses public procurement



Stephen McGibbon - Microsoft



Dr. Andy Hopkirk - National Computing Centre



Jenny Willott MP - Liberal Democrat Shadow Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster

Rising to the interoperability challenge

People are at the heart of how government agencies work together, policy implementation is the objective, and technology is the enabler.

The ability to connect government agencies and getting the pieces of the technology puzzle to work across organisations and across platforms to help people connect and deliver services to citizens is achievable. A recent roundtable discussion between politicians, government officials and representatives of the IT community, hosted in the House of Commons and organised by The House Magazine in association with Microsoft, focussed on the challenges and opportunities for interoperability.

Technical solutions to enable policy framework

The ever increasing complexity of ICT and its heterogeneity, poses the industry players with the compelling imperative of ensuring interoperability between the different

systems, the data they process and the organisations they connect.

Stephen McGibbon from Microsoft explained that physical and technical interoperability problems can generally be resolved. "Increasingly we know how to make computer systems that inherently are able to talk to one another", he said. The importance of addressing technical issues is acknowledged, but it doesn't end there. Today's interoperability problems are at the process, data, policy, and legal levels.

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Andrew Miller MP told participants that Politicians are interested in the needs of the citizens, and in the opportunities presented by interoperability for improving service delivery. "There is a pragmatic reason why

the political process has to engage with the interoperability and ICT debate", he said.

Simplification was raised as a key objective to the benefit of the citizen. Bill McCluggage, the Deputy Government CIO, stated that "we should be aiming for simplification and standardisation". Standards help to build systems that are interoperable.

Of course, users don't want to be part of any standards battle they just want to be able to connect their systems together.

However the challenges facing public services are complex and the public sector often has no choice but to serve a universal audience, noted Gisela Stuart MP.

Participants shared the view that technology should enable policy implementation, and in this way technology should be used to help meet the challenge of efficient and effective public service delivery. As budgets become tighter, and citizens demand increased access to public services (especially digital and

on-line) adopting a framework to connect departments securely and efficiently would contribute to meet government targets but also drive satisfaction with citizens.

Innovative procurement

During the second half of the discussion Paul Morris of Microsoft shared his thoughts on the public procurement process. Systems have to work better together and government should encourage more small businesses to see the public sector as a marketplace for them. Policy makers should focus on how they can simplify the procurement process to create a level playing field and make it easier and cheaper for small businesses to take part.

Lord Erroll noted how large contractors might have less incentive to innovate, and cited the Netherlands as an example, where public sector contracts are much more fragmented. Building innovation and collaboration into the process will help improve public services.

Dr. Andy Hopkirk, director of the NCC's

e-Government Interoperability Framework programme, warned that while innovation is risky "we need to develop a greater tolerance of risk".

"Building innovation and collaboration into the process will help improve public services"

In a final assessment, it was noted how technology can reasonably provide solutions to most problems, the question is about what policy makers want to do and how the industry can provide these solutions. Attendees agreed that all efforts to look after the citizens' needs are strengthened through a collaborative approach to interoperability from the different stakeholders in the ICT industry and Government bodies.

Microsoft



Lord Erroll talks to the group about innovation in the public sector



Bill McCluggage - Deputy Government CIO



Andrew Miller MP - Parliamentary IT Committee



Gisela Stuart MP - Editor, The House Magazine