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Changing the relationship between government and the citizen: the role of e-government

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Introduction

The continuing debates and concerns about the engagement of citizens with government generate considerable theoretical and applied discourse on understanding this 'problem'. Overall, there is an assumption that a 'healthy' democracy is one in which 'there are major opportunities for the mass of ordinary people actively to participate' [Crouch 2000 p1]. Some of those who enter this debate are concerned with the theory of the modern state. Much of this debate relies on improving models of engagement between citizens and the state based on a traditional relationship which primarily revolves around the producer's view. These traditional relationships are primarily related to the political or administrative boundaries of an area or country, producer definitions of services or policy 'choices' within largely prescribed rules such as referenda about council tax rises. Additionally, there are some who would argue that this effort to improve engagement is largely illusory, with professionals, politicians and administrators preferring to maintain the status quo. Others support the notion that politicians, and those who support them, rely primarily on the media for response on direction. On the other hand, there are those who are concerned with the means of improving active democratic engagement, point to evidence of increasingly different participative outcomes in varying types of engagement exercises – e.g. housing tenure transfer ballots and direct elections for mayors. These pilots are beginning to demonstrate a change in behaviours on the part of the citizens, service providers and politicians.

In terms of solutions to this 'problem' of democratic engagement, there are those who have argued or hoped that e-government could make a significant contribution. These are few in number and generally sit within a majority view that social exclusion will prevent more direct engagement whether by means or inclination. This paper sets out to examine the emerging evidence of the potential of e.government to change the nature of the citizen relationship with government and the government's responses as producer. This dynamic could generate considerable changes in patterns of governance at the local and central level, which this paper seeks to identify. It draws almost exclusively on the conditions of current English policy [with differing policies to achieve the same objective are in operation in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland]. It concludes with the development of further research questions for future consideration. It remains work in progress.

The Citizen/state contract

Although there have been various forms in which the delivery of the state's contract with the citizen have taken over the period since 1945, there remains a fundamental understanding of the Government's provision of 'citizenship' services. These include 'certain levels of education, health services, certain forms of care in case of need,

financial support in old age and in the event of temporary or permanent loss of earnings capacity through unemployment, ill health or injury' [Crouch 2003 p6]. In the last twenty years, the debate has not primarily focused so much on the 'what' of this delivery but rather the 'how'. Concerns about the delivery of public services through the private sector and new public management models have dominated the producer arguments [e.g. Marchinton et al 2003; Woodman 1999]. In the same period, consumer concerns have been less visible in comparison, say, with the evidence based approach to policy making in the 1950s and 1960s. This producer driven approach has been dominated by concerns about efficiency, price and delivery effectiveness. There are inevitable citizen benefits to be gained from these approaches [e.g. hospital waiting list reduction, improvements in educational attainment], although these benefits are primarily concentrated within existing definitions and parameters of service delivery. Even here arguments are made about the loss of the relationship between the citizen and the service provider [Crouch 2003].

The more recent shift in the debate from issues of government to those of governance marks a new way of demonstrating an equality in the contractual relationship between government and the citizen. It also represents a move away from subject to citizen [Magnette 2003]. This transfer has been engendered by a number of issues. Firstly, the concept of governmental legitimacy is being seen as one of considerable concern [Parkinson 2003] in the context of notional 'democratic deficits' being defined by low voter turnout. Other issues have centred around the increase of the appointed quangocracy, which has not significantly reduced since 1997 and the privatisation of services. In seeking to overcome these democratic deficits, a number of approaches have been adopted. One has been to redefine the boundaries of the government to governance. Another has been by widening the areas and organisation involved in the political process into the voluntary and business movements. A third approach has been to widen the means of citizen engagement through citizens juries, focus groups, telephone polls etc. Finally, new methods to improve citizen engagement in traditionally legitimating ways have been introduced such as the ballot box through new e-voting methods [Representation of the People Act 2000].

As part of this contract between the citizen and the government, the principle of participation is seen to be one of the key elements. Active participation has been used to generate the form of executive in each local authority and is being enshrined in the White Paper on European Government [Magnette 2003]. Although democratic participation is not necessarily a primary concern in a citizen's life; participation in normal electoral events is seen to be a minimum, for political legitimacy of any ruling group [although it may be considered as an adequate maximum from the citizen's perspective].. Where the citizen can influence the outcome of a vote directly, experience in the local ballots on stock transfer or neighbourhood area renewal are proving more successful in generating high turnouts. Here all stakeholders are expressing a real choice, which will determine action as a response to their vote, similar to the evictions in the Big Brother House – a recent major demonstration of mass participation. Another example of a popular vote has been for a local mayor

Yet active citizenship, through participation is not always viewed positively. Where citizen engagement reaches higher levels of participation, particularly at the local level of governance, there are often concerns that the process can be taken over by local elites. Such groups may generate campaigns for NIMBY ends, whether in attempts to stop new housing developments or the location of certain types of community facilities such as

hostels for asylum seekers or ex-offenders. Attempts to increase citizen engagement often show that it is where people are against proposed government actions that they rise up and organise [e.g. fuel protests Doherty et al 2003] rather than where they support the general run of policy. As active participation is being encouraged, the concerns about active participation by the articulate are being balanced by a return to evidence based policy making in such processes as the development of Community Strategies [DTLR 2001]. Evidence about the progress of citizens in educational attainment, about road deaths or low health levels are expected to be used to target policies for improvement across all the public sector agencies at the local level. At the neighbourhood level this may be undertaken through neighbourhood renewal areas. At a higher scale this may be the main task of the Local Strategic Partnership [LSP] [DTLR 2001]. Evidence based policy making is a balancing counterweight where there are fears that the articulate can strongly sway outcomes. Since 1997, advice has been given to ensure that all participation methods are balanced [DETR 1998] although as yet there is little evidence that is undertaken in a systematic way. However, there is evidence that at a local service level, the best value process [Local Government Act 1999] is promoting a more inclusive evidence based approach to service delivery. This approach will take at least five years to reach all local services but represents a significant change in consistent review of delivery. In addition to this, at the local level, scrutiny has been introduced in England which is able to examine the adequacy of policy and the effectiveness of delivery in processes, which are seen to parallel Parliamentary Select Committees. Although there have been numerous concerns expressed about the role of scrutiny within new council structures [Snape and Taylor 2000; Leach 2002; Copus 2001; Sweeting and Ball 2002], it has some potential for holding the local executive to account. It can also express views on the participative nature of a council's activities.

Although all these means are being used to increase active citizen engagement with the state there are also those who argue that governments are now in post-democratic conditions. The influence of the media on politicians or the power of a globalised economy could render local decision making redundant [Crouch 2000]. Some are arguing that these changes are so fundamental that this leads to a new citizen contract. Many of the proposed means of improving participation in the democratic process as a means of improving political legitimacy relate to new means of delivering existing relationships such as the increase in the number of directly elected mayors, citizens referenda and the introduction of proportional representation. All these methods may change the citizen's credibility of the democratic basis of the political machine but in themselves may not change the citizen's contract with the state. What has proved more effective within these existing arrangements are those who have shown that they can mobilise around causes. There has been a surge in these activities since 2000 and include the countryside marches, the Fuel demonstrations [Doherty et al 2003] and local cause groups, which are able to defeat sitting MPs in pursuance of decisions different to those determined by Government policy such as hospital closures in Wyre Forest. There has also been a rise in the election of councillors from the BNP.

There are those, such as Bobbitt [2002], who are seeking to redefine the contract between the government and the citizen. Instead of the old contract, in which the government promises better material welfare for its citizens, the new contract moves to one where the government will maximise the opportunity of its people in a so called 'market state' model. One reading of Bobbitt's approach could be to promote a more welfarist approach within a predominately US market culture, with its emphasis on educational, environmental protection, productivity and public health. However, his

observations on the reduced role of border and boundaries may be more salient. Bobbitt argues that the ability of states to rely solely on internal legitimacy is reducing as 'market states' increasingly co-operate with others for the agreement of operational rules for trade etc. The role of the state is reducing, Bobbitt argues, if it is defined as acting on its own. This has implications for the contract between the state and its citizens.

Other approaches to changing this relationship concentrate on the failure of participation amongst specific groups related to age or class. There has been particular concern about the loss of interest in young people, which is seen to have considerable implications for the future of voting behaviours, thus fundamentally questioning the basis of future political legitimacy [Henn et al 2002]. As Henn et al found, there is no evidence of a lack of interest in political issues from young people but rather a concern that traditional means of participation do not seem to affect outcomes. However, this research did show that varying the form of elections as enabled by the representation of the people Act 2000 would encourage more participation in the electoral process. Such forms offered included voting by phone and internet or in a public place. The greatest interest was generated by being able to vote over more than one day. Young people were also interested in compulsory voting as a means of encouraging participation – a means which is found to be successful in Australia [Hill 2002]. Other research has shown that participation in planning exercises has been made more useful where all responses and comments were made available on the web over the period of consultation [Murray and Greer 2002]. In these cases effective participation in decision making did not revolve on single relationships between the state and the citizen but a more interactive style where there could be other dialogues between participants. In this case, the web helped to re-create a 'public meeting' style, where responses could be developed and evolved. On the other hand, Blaug [2002] has shown that not all attempts to achieve this interactive style are successful.

Thus the citizen/government contract may need some further redefining. This approach has been extolled by the Prime Minister [OPSR 2002] in a move to promote delivery effectiveness and improved accountability. The prime Minister's approach includes the principle of universal service whilst devolving power and innovation to the front line [Blair 2002]. The origins of this approach seem to relate both to the perceived need to improve delivery performance [by Central Government] and to generate a fundamental change in the role of citizen/central state relations. Add to this the proposals for a general power of competence and local tax raising currently being considered for local authorities in Scotland, then this picture moves further to potentially change the state/citizen relationship – moving a considerable focus from central to local. Citizen engagement with the formal processes of democracy can have some new meaning if local tax levels and levels of local service can be determined through the ballot box.

There have been some attempts to generate an operational approach to this devolved agenda through the notion of 'new localism' [Corry and Stoker 2002]. This approach enshrines a different, more minimalist central state role where local delivery of current central state provided services brings a different democratic approach. In 'new localism', the relationship between the central state and local delivery can be fundamentally changed. In his foreword to 'new localism', Ed Balls, Chief Economic adviser to the Treasury, talks about 'devolving power to those best placed to make decisions' [2002 p6]. Corry and Stoker talk about the need to move beyond 'steered centralism' to 'new localism' which they clearly relate to new forms of participative democracy,

'Embracing community leadership as our goal rests on a commitment to a rich understanding of democracy where community governance arrangements mean that problems are in part solved by drawing on the creativity and imagination of local people' [Corry and Stoker 2002 p21].

The underlying drivers for new localism include a need to address local issues across a range of public agencies. In their conclusion, Corry and Stoker state:

Finally we champion localism because we recognise the need to constantly experiment to see what work. ...One size is unlikely to fit all. But we also want innovative councils, with significant freedoms to spend, to explore possible solutions and maybe even to tax, to try things that if they work others may later copy. In most areas that is more likely to lead to successful policy making than a team of Whitehall experts thinking out a theoretical and universal objective and/or solution to be imposed across the board [p23 Corry and Stoker 2002].

Operationalising this form of localism requires new powers and a reformed view of the role of the centre. However, some of these objectives can be supported in their delivery objectives by using new means including e-government. The use of e-government can change the means of interaction [Flinders 2002] whilst not seeking to replicate existing means of interaction, which as Blaug [2002] has demonstrated can repeatedly fail despite repackaging. 'New localism' is related to an understanding that 'Central Government has only limited control over many of the people and institutions responsible for delivery' Cabinet Office 2001 p5]. The ability to join up services around citizens at the local level now can be more rapidly operationalised using e-government tools than has been possible before. These tools provide the means to provide citizens with their entitlements rather than expect each individual to pursue claims from a plethora of agencies. These entitlements can be generated either personally or through intermediaries. E-government can change 'the relationship between the governors and the governed will be more complex, direct and immediate' [p33], leading to greater transparency and disclosure [Flinders 2002].

There are potential dangers for loss of accountability and these need to be recognised if responsibility is not transferred at the same time as delivery. Local delivery of central services, through an 'agent' role, could generate as many concerns as those expressed about privatisation. However, delivery which is driven by entitlement of all financial benefits, whichever part of government currently provides them, starts to reengineer the citizen's relationship with the state. Although ensuring that entitlement details are correct remains a key concern, the ability to improve take up in under-claiming households, to change payments as soon as circumstances change and to switch on new services at the point of immediate need such as free school meals is a prize worth considering. Such entitlement approaches can remove the dependency relationship between the citizen and the state, which currently is seen to persist. Entitlement can be seen as less emotive than 'benefit' although all words can be overlaid with new meanings in time.

Such approaches have considerable implications for the providers of services to citizens particularly from central agencies. Some Departments of State have a wide range of citizen products, which are available through different application processes. In some cases, the financial products may be aimed at differing age groups, although there are

also many occasions when these benefits interact and have cross implications. Work such as that being generated now [ODPM www.local.gov.uk] is leading to the creation of a single benefits calculator for both direct and mediated use. This calculator, using the Government Gateway [Cross 2003] [www.gateway.gov.uk] can also be operationalised to generate delivery of all the entitlement's menu applicable in each individual case.

The barriers to citizen engagement and delivery

Thus the contract between the citizen and the state, whether in the existing or new forms, is likely to depend from the citizen's perspective by the ways in which a series of interactions are seen to work. This will include how easy they are to operationalise and also the credibility of their outcome – can I make any difference? From this review, it is possible to summarise these as follows:

1. Form of interaction – is it easy to use?
2. Issues to be considered – how meaningful are they?
3. Decisions – are they at least in part dependent on the interaction?
4. Organisational cultures – are these amenable to the interaction and its potential outcome?
5. Administrative silos – are these preventing access? Do organisations treat me as the same person without multiple provision of the same information?
6. Professionalism – are boundaries preventing joined up delivery?
7. Tracking – can I always find out where my concerns are in the process?
8. Citizens or subjects – am I central to the process or am I lucky to get what is given?

The nature of joined up government

The primary means of attacking these issues of citizen barriers has been a variety of forms of Joined Up Government [JUG]. In the Labour Government 1997-2001, the focus on JUG came as a response to poor service delivery and the failure of the system to generate solutions around people rather than producer driven silo delivery. The use of the Policy Action Team [PAT] formula for social exclusion was one means that was pursued during this period. [Morphet 2003]. Another was the use of the Cabinet Office Policy and Innovation Unit undertaking cross cutting studies e.g. on Better Policy Delivery and Design [2001]. Pollitt [2003] offers a definition of JUG in the absence of any clear definition from Government literature and in this he identifies one of the key benefits which can be achieved as the possibility of offering 'citizens seamless rather than fragmented access to a set of related services' [p35]. In this definition the other benefits are primarily seen to be producer driven such as the achievement of efficiencies and reduction of negative impacts – all important but not necessarily as user driven in interpretation as many of the JUG initiatives suggest is their driving force. A further concern with definition remains that the citizen is still having to 'access' services rather than using JUG as a means of 'entitlement' – a move from citizen 'pull' in terms of service delivery to government 'push'.

Much work on JUG considers the organisational and cultural barriers to delivery but little of the literature considers the growing means by which JUG can be delivered, particularly using e-government tools. The pressure of change on existing producers can be enhanced if both the means is available and that practical demonstration projects start to remove objections to change from organisational interests. It could be argued

that all these conditions have been present before and these have not resulted in the extent of change promised or expected. Knowing about organisational failure had both necessarily resulted in new ways of working. The case of e-government may be different. It has a number of different drivers and the delivery changes are coming from different parts of the governance model that is at the local level, where, although not perfect, local accountability is seen to be much closer to delivery. The pre-conditions which differ this time are not only related to the Prime Minister's objective of devolved responsibility [OPSR 2002] but also the significant growth in confidence in the ability of local government to perform well as demonstrated by the Comprehensive Performance assessment process [ODPM 2002]. However, these changed conditions go further. The delivery of e-government, at the local level, is inherently joined up and citizen focused. It has been set seven critical tests of success, which are:

1. joined up in ways that make sense to the customer
2. accessible
3. delivered [or supported] electronically
4. delivered jointly
5. delivered seamlessly
6. open and accountable
7. used by citizens

[e-gov@local DTLR 2002]

The leadership for delivery at the local level is political, through the appointment of an e-champion, and the success of delivery is monitored through a best value performance indicator BVPI 157 which requires demonstration of 100% of local e-enablement across 10 generic transactions by December 2005. Additionally, local authorities are being invited to work in partnership with other councils for joint delivery to citizens and development of citizen focused products for e-enabled delivery are being developed by local authorities for each other. These latter approaches, largely encompassed in a programme of national projects are including central government departments to develop citizen join up from the local level. The funding for National projects, at £80m in 2002-4 is being given to local authorities rather than to central government Departments, a requirement made by the treasury who have funded a total of £660m from 2001-6 through the Comprehensive Spending Reviews of 2000 and 2002. The other factor which may have some bearing on this differing approach to delivery, is that the policy and implementation of the programme has been generated by former senior local government officers working at the ODPM [Morphet 2003]. These approaches offer new meaning to JUG and its application in reform of citizen delivery.

The role of e-government in delivery

E-government is about using technology to provide services in ways which people prefer. In the Modernising Government White Paper [1999], the Prime Minister established a target for all government services to be e-enabled for the citizen by December 2005. This approach was based on discussions which were seen to be part of the 1997 agenda which from the outset were proposing a move from central to local delivery, with government as a whole being seen to be 'convenient, customised and cost effective [Byrne 1997]. The same 2005 e-government target was applied to local and central government although the means of measurement of the achievement of that target were different. For Central Government, the emphasis was on the development of

e.business plans which concentrated on the services provided by Whitehall Departments and Agencies directly to the public. These services were seen as the main way to achieve the highest percentages of e-enabled services by volume e.g. Inland Revenue's on-line tax return service. In concentrating on individual services with high volume, central government service e.enablement has often concentrated on single channels for delivery. Business cases have led to the use of web or the telephone as the main means of delivery often leading to other traditional channels being expected to be closed down. This has often led to concerns being expressed about low levels of take up of web based services – people prefer to use the phone [ICM 2003] or that many of those in greatest need of government services such as the poor or the elderly do not have access to web based services. However, experience in the delivery of e-government services in Portugal for example shows that village mediators at the local level can have an important impact on delivery improvement in rural areas [Moreira 2003]. This concern was also addressed in 'e-gov Electronic Government services for the 21st century' [Cabinet Office 2000] which determined a multi channel policy to delivery of e-based services.

In comparison with central government, local authorities deliver a far greater range of services to people in a much wider range of personal situations. These range from purchasing a garden recycling bag to serious child protection matters. Given this, local authorities have taken the view that single channel access is not an option. Rather local authorities offer a range of channels so that citizens can use their channel of choice for any particular service [DTLR 2001a]. Although there is a focus on web only delivery in central government and the EU [CEC 2003], there is evidence that web only does meet all the needs of government delivery [Wright 2002].

However, local authorities also quickly saw that e.enablement could help to streamline the back office to provide more joined up citizen services. Although there is an efficiency driver in this approach, it is primarily focused on resolution of all issues at the first contact and using multi-service contact centres. This is engineering a fundamental change in the philosophy of public service delivery in England – that the council takes the responsibility for drawing together all entitlements and services for citizens based on eligibility rather than citizens having to explore the system or to use intermediaries to help them. This develops the notion of the individual citizen or business account – a concept that is growing into delivery.

The immediate contact with citizens, regardless of the channel, is increasingly likely to be supported by the use of a customer relations management system [CRM], which can track customers or citizens through these different points of contact. A CRM can ensure that the organisation knows that it is dealing with the same person. Personal needs can be profiled to ensure that people receive the best service. This process can be extended so that a call or email, which is automatically put into the back office system, can be performance managed, and commitment accounted. The process can be transparent throughout its passage through the system by the citizen on the website, at home or in the library or through digital tv. The same information can be used by staff engaged in face to face processes or on the phone, using the same technology.

The achievement of the local authority e-government target is measured through a different means in comparison with central government. Instead of focusing on key services, local authorities are required to demonstrate their e.enablement progress through the delivery of ten generic transactions that cover every aspect of the council's

business. The progress towards achieving 100% e.enablement is to be measured annually through the application of a Best Value Performance Indicator 157, which was activated in 2001/2. The measurement of progress towards e.enablement for local authorities takes place as part of the annual returns to the Best Value Performance Plan [BVPP] in June each year.

BVPI 157 includes ten specific transactions or 'interactions' by which the Council' progress is measured. These are:

1. Providing information
2. Collecting revenue
3. Providing benefits and grants
4. Consultation
5. Regulation
6. Application for services
7. Booking venues, courses and resources
8. Paying for goods and services
9. Providing access to community, professional or business networks
10. procurement

[DETR 2000a]

In order to deliver in ways that are joined up to the citizen, local authorities also took the view that they could go further. Not only would it be helpful if all services within the local authority could be delivered jointly but also these should be joined in some way to those public services which are delivered by other organisations – notably central government Departments. For planning matters, this was seen to provide far greater integration with other agencies such as the Environment Agency, Fire Service, Health and Safety Executive etc [www.parsol.gov.uk]. This could also be extended across neighbouring areas to reduce the impact of administrative and geographical boundaries where this made sense to the user. In planning, there are obvious benefits and user synergies in a joined up regulatory and enforcement processes where often a number of organisations are involved at different points in the process. This also extends to consultees on planning policy and application matters. Thus the way in which the citizen receives services can be changed if they wish to use either web or telephone but familiar means are still available albeit they all lead into the same back office systems and legacy databases. This also has application in other areas such as working with the Department of Work and Pensions on the provision of a joined up benefits service to ensure that financial entitlement is more available.

There are also considerable efforts being made to deliver local authority services across local authority administrative boundaries. Some of this partnership working is developing rapidly in areas of two tier government, where interlocking services can be delivered at differing tiers. The ability of the upper tier to offer lower tier services and vice versa is now being developing using the same portals and CRM systems. However, there is no evidence that local democratic accountability at the local level is being lost with appropriate branding being maintained. The same approach is being developed across four London boroughs led by Kingston upon Thames which is developed complete interconnections with Richmond, Merton and Hounslow. Other partnerships are developing joint service delivery in addition to the 'no boundaries approach to service access. The Welland Partnership in the East Midlands is possibly one of the most

developed subregional partnership in England in this respect. Other joined up service delivery is being developed by work with other public agencies e.g. with the police in East Riding, health in Herefordshire and Fire in Devon. All of these approaches have been fostered by Local Public Service Agreements [LPSAs]. In other localities, the development of more comprehensive joined up approaches across members of the Local Strategic Partnership [LSP] are leading to joint delivery to citizens with specific initiative being developed in Hartlepool, Herefordshire and Harrow. Other councils are seeking to join up delivery outlets to ensure that the first time resolution concept is being extended. Some are achieving this through an assets review of all property owned by the LSP e.g. Stockport, through Care Direct pilots e.g. Somerset or through reengineering public delivery space at the local level e.g. Dacorum, Suffolk.

In addition to the Prime Minister's target for e-government achievement in local and central government, the eu has also identified e-government as one of their major fields of activity in eEurope [CEC 2003]. In this programme, which was formally adopted on 21 February 2003, the Action Plan has identified a Common list of basic public services which list twenty transactions which the member state governments have agreed should be benchmarked cross the EU. This list of services includes applications for building permission which we can assume is planning consent. The other transactions deal with issues such change of address, car registration, enrolment in higher education. Achievement of the these targets is to be benchmarked [CEC 2002] and includes the number of services available on the web but also the use of the web for four monitored transactions – obtaining information, obtaining forms, returning completed forms. There is also a supplementary indicator which each member state is asked to identify how many public transactions are integrated with the back office. The focus on the use of the web and emphasis on back office integration probably goes further than the BVPI 157 requirements as they stand for England. Nevertheless considerable progress is being encouraged in this direction through the annual process of each authority producing an Implementing Electronic Government Statement [ODPM 2002d] and the national strategy on locale-government [ODPM 2002b].

Progress on achieving e-government targets at the local level is now beginning to be measured and assessed in a number of ways. In addition to the BVPI 157 returns, the Audit Commission undertook a study in 2002 entitled 'Message beyond the medium' which demonstrated that although progress was being made some councils remained hesitant. Successful implementation was seen to be linked to the recognition of the need for cultural and organisational change in processes as well as that engendered by new technologies. Returns made to the Office of Deputy Prime Minister in 2002, as part of the Implementing Electronic Government Statements showed that virtually all councils in England expect to be on track to achieve the target. These assessments are subject to external audit and other inspection processes such as CPA and Best Value Inspections.

The contribution of e-government to the government/citizen contract

Earlier in this paper, the changing nature of the relationship between the citizen and government was reviewed and the barriers to promoting an increasingly participative style in the interactions which form part of this relationship were identified as:

1. Form of interaction – is it easy to use?
2. Issues to be considered – how meaningful are they?

3. Decisions – are they at least in part dependent on the interaction?
4. Organisational cultures – are these amenable to the interaction and its potential outcome?
5. Administrative silos – are these preventing access? Do organisations treat me as the same person without multiple provision of the same information?
6. Professionalism – are boundaries preventing joined up delivery?
7. Tracking – can I always find out where my concerns are in the process?
8. Citizens or subjects – am I central to the process or am I lucky to get what is given?

E-government provides local tools of governance and delivery, which can begin to overcome these barriers although these need to be combined with organisational and political will. Easier transactions do not improve the experience if they remain unjoined or low in relevance. The combination of channels can improve the *means* as citizen's can use the method they prefer on each occasion. At the same time, the citizen should be able to obtain added value from each transaction regardless of the means, so that requests for one service can lead to the offer of others which could be available or relevant. Although e-government cannot make any difference to the issues that are available for JUG or a more participative style, it can start to provide comparisons between practices at the local level with the potential for creating new acceptable norms of activity.

The provision of e-government also creates more transparency [Flinders 2002] with less ability to withhold information. Issues that have also been primarily regarded as '*professional*' can also be opened to wider participation through e-government. This can occur in a variety of ways – through greater provision of information about entitlement rules, viewing progress of applications and cases and also through the development of one stop delivery for services, which can expose specific services to more detached performance monitoring. E-government can also provide more information not only on the issue but also during the process of decision-making [Murray and Greer 2002]. E-Government cannot remove all the barriers to joint working between professionals, but the ability to join case records or track those in the system changes the parameters of potential delivery. One recent example of this is that for children at potential risk in the system as is being established by the IRT system being implemented by the Children's and Young Person's Unit. Another is in the joint provision for adult support being developed through Care Direct. These joined up systems encourage an open debate between different professional groups on differing but similar application forms, differing protocols for similar reasons or services. These joined up approaches also allow for all appropriate staff to be able to access and contribute to records, enabling case-tracking regardless of child movements and multiple agency involvement.

E-government cannot change the nature of the content of *decisions* and this remains a matter for political determination. However, it can assist in changing the climate of what can be considered and how this can be done. The same is true of *Organisational cultures* although the openness of e-government can create a context within which internally driven producer cultures are less acceptable. Where JUG is needed around the citizen, existing cultures can be challenged particularly when these services are e-enabled. Reforms including Business Process Re-engineering [BPR] may assist in removing long-established working practices where these persist. The same is true of *administrative silos* where these are preventing access to service and entitlement. Organisations can now treat citizens as the same person without multiple provision of

the same information. Services again can be offered proactively rather than the weight of responsibility for service access being primarily on the citizen. Citizens can track the progress of their own business and organisations will be more exposed to dealing with the causes of delay. Poor access to service will no longer be able to be used as a means of rationing service delivery.

Finally, e-government can encourage the transition from people being Citizens rather than subjects. Entitlement can be clearer and more accessible. It can be related to individual circumstances and public service can start to provide added value. The reduced distance between the service and the responsible organisation can help improve accountability. Increased expectations of citizen centred delivery methods, which are transparent, participative and clearly monitored can all serve to change this state/citizen contract. Citizens can be central to the process rather than feel lucky with what they are given.

Changing the citizen's relationship with government?

The use of e-government is part of a broader trend in society where service has become more individual and tailored to the specific requirements of the customer [Audit Commission 2003; Brown et al 2002a; Illsley et al 1999]. These pressures and the governmental challenges are increasingly demanding different responses from current government service providers. There are pressures for all services to join a more mainstream delivery to citizens [Illsley et al 1999; Mophet 2003 forthcoming; Ling 2002]. . As yet very little has been written about this issue other than generic studies of the use of the internet for transactions [Brown et al 2002]. Although there are those who have considerable concerns about the use of e.government technology for all groups [Graham 2002] there are others [Grieco 2000] who demonstrate how 'wired ' government reintroduces local and community decision making. There is some evidence that there are some age and class groups which are less likely to use web or text messaging as a means of undertaking transactions services and some age groups for which this is the almost exclusive means of communication.

This paper has set the context for these changes in the citizen and state contract. It has demonstrated that e-government has the potential to make a considerable direct contribution to these more localised processes whilst indirectly changing expectations of how citizens are engaged with government and governance. The paper demonstrates that the changes being generated within government service providers are moving the citizen's expectation that it is the government that will be proactive in provision. The state will be responsible for joining up policy and delivery. The state will tailor services to individual needs. The state will provide added value at the point of contact and the citizen will choose the channel or means of delivery. These changes, which are already in progress and due to become widely available in every local authority in the next three years. They could provide entirely new models of governance, which will require a new balance in the state citizen relationship. These changes are planned and are foretold in 'Modernising Government' in 1999 [Cabinet Office]. Is it time to write the next instalment now that these modernising government objectives have now largely been met?

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