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**The Government's Response to *The Power of Information: An independent review* by Ed Mayo and Tom Steinberg (2007)**





The Government's Response to  
*The Power of Information:*  
*An independent review by*  
*Ed Mayo and Tom Steinberg*  
(2007)

Presented to Parliament by  
the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster  
by Command of Her Majesty

JUNE 2007

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# INTRODUCTION



I commissioned the Power of Information Review in light of the fast-changing world. From 1998 to 2006, use of the internet in the UK has grown explosively, from 9% to 57% of households connected to the internet.<sup>1</sup> A small group of mums can reach an audience of hundreds of thousands. They do not need a large organisation with an expensive IT support system or technological expertise. If 30,000 parents were meeting in a park or football stadium to share information and tips about parenting, government would take notice.

Citizens are helping each other in online communities, and working towards the same goals as government on a range of issues, from parenting to health and financial management.

The need to understand these changes is clear. But there are no simple solutions. I wanted independent advice, from experts in online information and consumer advice. It was for these reasons that I asked Ed Mayo and Tom Steinberg to examine this topic and I welcome their recommendations. I would like to thank them for their analysis and insights. It has been a learning process for me and I know that departments are taking up the challenges they set out.

Government should work in partnership with the best of citizens' efforts, not replicate them. If we really want to deliver better public services, the best way to do that is bottom up. Change is driven by better feedback, open information and more ways in which citizens can make their voices heard about what matters to them. The challenge is for all public bodies to think about how they can respond to the challenges described here.

This document sets out how government will respond to take forward the recommendations made by the independent Review.

Government should take on three main challenges:

- engaging in partnership with user-led online communities;
- ensuring that it fully understands and responds appropriately to changes in the information market; and
- advising civil servants on how best to participate in new media.

Government is not going to be expert at this overnight. We need to experiment and learn in partnership. But I am confident we can meet the challenge set by this Review: to unlock the value of the information we collect on behalf of citizens; to deliver better public services; and to support world-class innovation that underpins a growing part of our knowledge economy.

**Hilary Armstrong**

June 2007

<sup>1</sup> Office for National Statistics, Households with access to the internet, Great Britain, 23 August 2006, available at [www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=5672](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=5672)

# OVERVIEW OF ISSUES RAISED IN THE REVIEW

1. This is the Government's response to the Power of Information Review.<sup>2</sup> The Government welcomes the Review and its findings in general. This response outlines how government plans to take forward the recommendations.

## Genesis of the Power of Information Review

2. The Policy Review *Building on progress: Public services* flagged up new forms of online activity:

*The Government should support the development of new and innovative services that provide tailored advice to specific groups (for example the netmums.com website which provides a discussion and advice forum for mothers). These are outside government's direct influence, but government has a role to play in supporting them – for example by ensuring that they are not undermined by government programmes or websites with similar objectives, and have easy access to publicly available information.<sup>3</sup>*

3. This was in response to a growing realisation that:

- advances in technology are empowering large numbers of people to create new social and economic value from public information;
- a new form of very large-scale self-help on public policy issues has been springing up online (e.g. www.netmums.com) which continues to grow and is just short of breaking through to the mass market;
- opportunities and threats arise from the above, but evidence had previously been anecdotal and analysis patchy;
- the corporate sector was facing similar issues but there was not consensus on how to respond;
- government had made isolated forays into this space with mixed effect;
- Britain seemed to demonstrate leading practice in these matters (notably the work of www.mysociety.org, often funded by government); and
- the role for government, its capacity and capability were unclear.

4. Against this background, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster commissioned the Review from Tom Steinberg, one of the world's leading practitioners of online re-use of government information, and Ed Mayo, a leading social entrepreneur and consumer activist.

5. The terms of reference for the Reviewers were:

*To explore new developments in the use and communication of citizen- and State-generated public information in the UK, and to present an analysis and recommendations to the Cabinet Office Minister as part of the Policy Review. The Review is focused upon public information and excludes discussion about individuals' private data that may be held by the public sector.*

<sup>2</sup> Mayo, E. and Steinberg, T. (2007). *The Power of Information: An independent review by Ed Mayo and Tom Steinberg*, available at [www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/publications/reports/power\\_information/power\\_information.pdf](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/publications/reports/power_information/power_information.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> HM Government (2007). *Building on progress: Public services*, p.38, available at [www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/policy\\_review/index.asp](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/policy_review/index.asp)

6. The Government takes three overarching lessons from this Review. Government should:

- **engage in partnership with user-led online communities:** to add value, help people and listen to peoples' views on public service, as indeed public servants do in the offline world. Government must engage or risk being left behind. These communities are a major new force in the communications landscape and it is important that the public sector engages with them. Government will work with online communities but take care not to smother them, or unnecessarily replicate their efforts;
- **ensure that it fully understands and responds appropriately to changes in the information market:** the markets for public sector information have changed fundamentally due to technological advances. The Power of Information Review by Ed Mayo and Tom Steinberg and the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) report<sup>4</sup> make it clear that there are new issues that need to be addressed. Government will publish a study on these issues. The terms of reference for this study are currently under development but it is expected to concentrate on availability and pricing of public sector information by trading funds;<sup>5</sup> and
- **advise civil servants on how best to participate in new media:** government should provide clear and consistent advice to civil servants on how to fulfil their role in both online and offline contexts. This should involve providing accurate, helpful and timely information to the public.

7. Our understanding is that the UK Government is the first in the world to have commissioned a review of this kind. The UK experience in this area seems to be particularly vivid and we would welcome information on analogous activities elsewhere in the world.

8. This response concerns non-devolved matters. The Minister for the Cabinet Office has written to the leaders of the devolved administrations to commend the Review to them and has invited them to respond in as far as matters apply to their administrations.

9. Using the Review's headings, the Government has a number of overarching observations.

### Changes in the use and availability of information and why they matter

10. Since 1998, use of the internet in Britain has grown explosively, from 9% to 57% of households connected in 2006,<sup>6</sup> against a background of a prosperous economy, a strong education system, a world-class regulatory environment and competitive markets. A historical perspective will label this growth of the internet one of the great sociological changes of the last 50 years.

11. The example of large-scale community activity demonstrated by the Review shows the benefits of very large proportions of society being online. It shows people adapting to the online environment with creativity and ingenuity and using it to tackle the challenges they face in their daily lives. It also shows a shift in behaviour from passive information services to more interactive services or, in the jargon, from web 1.0 to web 2.0. It is particularly striking that information created by very small numbers of people resolving a problem can then be shared with hundreds of thousands at no cost. The Review also shows some of the disadvantages and hazards for government and the public. For example, the Review described the distribution of negative or inaccurate information among groups of anorexia nervosa sufferers.

12. The Reviewers proposed a simple vision for government for public information:

*that citizens, consumers and government can create, re-use and distribute information in ways that add maximum value.*<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Office of Fair Trading (2006). *The commercial use of public information*, available at [www.offt.gov.uk/shared\\_offt/reports/consumer\\_protection/oft861.pdf](http://www.offt.gov.uk/shared_offt/reports/consumer_protection/oft861.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Trading fund: a government department, executive agency or part of a department established as a trading fund by a Trading Fund Order made under the Government Trading Funds Act 1973. A trading fund has authority to use its receipts to meet its outgoings.

<sup>6</sup> Office for National Statistics, Households with access to the internet, Great Britain, 23 August 2006, available at [www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=5672](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=5672)

<sup>7</sup> Mayo, E. and Steinberg, T. (2007). *The Power of Information: An independent review by Ed Mayo and Tom Steinberg*, p.20, available at [www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/publications/reports/power\\_information/power\\_information.pdf](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/publications/reports/power_information/power_information.pdf)

**13.** The Review makes a helpful distinction between:

- large groups of people with little or no technical skills helping each other out online on subjects such as parenting and money management; and
- those who manipulate data to create new public information goods and services, known as ‘data mashers’, whose output can be used by large audiences. The technical skill required to ‘mash’ data is falling fast.

**14.** The Government accepts that in both cases economic and social value can be, and is being, created in new ways. Government accepts that the scale of activity set out in the Review would suggest that this activity is not a fad but a new social trend.

**15.** The Reviewers draw a comparison between online mutual support and the 19th-century cooperative and self-help movements. The Government finds this to be apposite. However, the Government is concerned that this comparison should not be misused as a simplistic justification for a return to laissez-faire government in areas where online self-help and mutual support are active.

**16.** The Government accepts the Review’s general findings that technological advances are increasing the value – especially the social and economic value – of information generated by the public sector. The internet and the ease with which large amounts of data can now be manipulated allow completely new uses to be made of government information. This can be done at costs that are much lower than before, and the results made available to many more people than before. This is a good thing, but like many innovations has significant disruptive potential to existing business models and practices.

## Challenges for government

**17.** The Government believes that the Reviewers could have painted a more positive picture of the Government’s progress to date:

- In many cases a cautious watching and learning brief is an appropriate response to rapid technological innovation.
- The Review itself cites examples of good practice in the public sector.
- Progress has been made since 1997. The Government’s Cross-cutting Review of the Knowledge Economy (2000)<sup>8</sup> made many positive changes, including the introduction of marginal cost pricing for raw data (with the exception of trading funds), the establishment of the Office of Public Sector Information (OPSI) as a regulator, and the introduction of Information Asset Registers.
- Some aspects of the Government’s licensing regimes, such as Click-Use licences, have in fact made re-use of data by leading ‘data mashers’ easy.
- The Department of Trade and Industry’s work with industry on the Effective Content Initiative<sup>9</sup> (including a series of public–private sector workshops) has helped raise awareness of the potential for innovation in new media in the public sector.
- Dialogue between officials, Ministers and the creators of user-generated sites informed the process leading up to this Review.
- The commissioning of the Review was designed to provide an information and analytical base for future action.

**18.** The NHS can point to good examples of working with agencies in the public, private and third sectors to promote the re-use of NHS data, although government recognises that there is no room for complacency. In particular, NHS Direct Online<sup>10</sup> and the National Library for Health<sup>11</sup> both work with user-led online

<sup>8</sup> HM Government (2000). *Cross-cutting review of the knowledge economy*, available at [www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/spending\\_review/spending\\_review\\_2000/associated\\_documents/spend\\_sr00\\_ad\\_ccrcontents.cfm](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/spending_review/spending_review_2000/associated_documents/spend_sr00_ad_ccrcontents.cfm)

<sup>9</sup> [www.dti.gov.uk/sectors/digitalcon/effectivecontent/page10175.html](http://www.dti.gov.uk/sectors/digitalcon/effectivecontent/page10175.html)

<sup>10</sup> [www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)

<sup>11</sup> [www.library.nhs.uk](http://www.library.nhs.uk)

communities to facilitate dissemination of quality information and promote patient choice and empowerment. They do this through sites such as DIPEX (Directory of Patient Experiences)<sup>12</sup> and [www.patient.co.uk](http://www.patient.co.uk).

**19.** Government welcomes the clarity provided by the Review in its focus on public sector rather than personal information. Much of the Government's work is derived from what is ultimately personal data and, in many cases, sensitive information, and we require robust safeguards, including the effective anonymisation of personal data, to ensure that the basic requirement of confidentiality is not compromised.

**20.** The Reviewers suggest that risk aversion plays a major part in limiting government engagement with user-generated media. The Reviewers also report a lack of skills and understanding among often junior officials. The Government notes this. The Government wishes to move to a risk-managed approach. It is well understood that risk aversion can actually create more risk by preventing action.<sup>13</sup>

**21.** The Reviewers note that *'the Government Communications Group is analysing the Government's digital and social media capability'*. The Permanent Secretary for Government Communications has, in parallel with the Power of Information Review, set up an internal Social Media Review that encompasses user-generated media. The outcomes of that Review will include equipping government communications professionals with the necessary skills to move from a risk-averse to a risk-managed engagement with user-generated media. The findings on social media will be published on the Cabinet Office website.

**22.** Work by the Central Office of Information (COI) to develop experimental partnerships between major departments and user-generated sites will no doubt reveal many challenges for government that need to be addressed.

## Exploring new opportunities

**23.** The Reviewers suggest that government *'can usefully participate in the new world of information production and distribution'*.<sup>14</sup> This finding accords with the Government's largely successful approach to online matters that in general there should be parity of approach for online and offline behaviour.

**24.** A modern service delivery strategy will seek to use channels popular with citizens. If large numbers of people are seeking advice on a public policy issue then government will often provide that advice through conventional media and should do the same online as new opportunities emerge. If, for instance:

- a debate about public services was taking place in the letters column of a newspaper, then the provider of that service might be expected to put their point of view in that medium; or
- 30,000 people gather in a park or stadium to discuss parenting or their problems with a regulated utility, the relevant parts of the public services should be interested in helping. Indeed, people would often expect such help.

**25.** The Reviewers, who between them have huge experience of online media and consumer behaviour, do not recommend a one-size-fits-all approach. They recommend that government should develop a programme of experimental partnership to engage with user-generated media. Subject to detailed comments on the recommendations below, the Government accepts this. However, it is the nature of experiments that they sometimes have unexpected consequences. The Government will adopt a beta testing model to signal clearly where an experiment is in progress.

<sup>12</sup> [www.dipex.org](http://www.dipex.org)

<sup>13</sup> See the National Audit Office report on risk management (*Supporting innovation: Managing risk in government departments*, HC 864, Session 1999–2000) and HM Treasury (2004). *The Orange Book: Management of risk – principles and concepts*

<sup>14</sup> Mayo, E. and Steinberg, T. (2007). *The Power of Information: An independent review by Ed Mayo and Tom Steinberg*, p.22, available at [www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/publications/reports/power\\_information/power\\_information.pdf](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/publications/reports/power_information/power_information.pdf)

**26.** Local government is frequently leading the way. The Reviewers unfortunately were not able to address local government practice in the time available. The generic issues set out in the Review and in this response apply equally to local and national government. The Government wishes to recognise the extent to which local government is making innovative use of the internet through initiatives such as the Digital Challenge competition.

**27.** There are tensions that the Reviewers do not fully explore in their observations about the Government not duplicating the efforts of pre-existing user-generated websites. The Government agrees that needless duplication is unsatisfactory. Government should neither smother nor crowd out innovators. The strength of new technologies is that, for example, a substantial self-help discussion forum with many tens of thousands of members can be run by one person as a volunteer. Or, indeed, ownership may be far from clear, being in the hands of many volunteers and stakeholders.

**28.** However, in a strict procurement, accountability and legal framework, it is challenging for government to rely wholly upon such organisations for delivering advice, especially on sensitive or controversial issues. Such challenges are often encountered when working in the offline world with the third sector and can be resolved with an appropriate risk management approach. This is an issue to explore in the experimentation that the Reviewers suggest.

### Public information charging, licensing and regulation

**29.** The Reviewers consulted with the civil servants working on the Government's response to the OFT's market report on the commercial use of public information.<sup>15</sup> This response to the Power of Information Review should be read alongside the Government's response to the OFT report, which will be published simultaneously with this response.

**30.** The Review further reinforces the arguments put by the OFT. Government recognises that the dynamics of information markets have changed radically due to advances in technology. An important part of this change is the ability of individual innovators and social entrepreneurs to create information goods and services that were once the preserve of large corporations. This is an important new segment of the knowledge economy. It is evidence of a healthy climate of innovation that demand for public sector information is growing. The Government wishes to find a way of unlocking innovative potential for public information without jeopardising the production of public information itself and in a cost-efficient manner. This requires further work on an evidence base and, subject to that work, possible amendments to policy for government bodies and the regulatory regime.

### Protecting the public interest

**31.** The Government welcomes the Reviewers' conclusion that there is a role for public servants to promote consistent and reliable information on public policy matters online. It agrees that this must be done professionally with appropriate guidance and training in order to yield benefits.

**32.** The Government notes that there is substantial potential for the socially excluded to benefit from the issues discussed in the Review both directly (such as isolated parents using Netmums) and indirectly (people receiving better benefits advice through services such as [www.rightsnet.org.uk](http://www.rightsnet.org.uk), where benefits advisers help each other out with difficult cases).

**33.** The Government will ensure that the Digital Inclusion Team is properly involved in implementing the Review's recommendations. The Team operates across and connects all sectors to stimulate innovation in the application of all varieties of digital technology, including, but not limited to, the internet. One particular focus

<sup>15</sup> Office of Fair Trading (2006). *The commercial use of public information*, available at [www.offt.gov.uk/shared\\_offt/reports/consumer\\_protection/oft861.pdf](http://www.offt.gov.uk/shared_offt/reports/consumer_protection/oft861.pdf)

is on the partnerships at local level between public and third sector agencies that deliver advice and services to socially disadvantaged people. It is therefore right for it to be the organisation to look at the potential of user-generated sites to benefit such people, and it is a natural extension of its work.

### Next steps

**34.** The Government will make a progress report in December 2007 in line with that required to respond to the OFT. This response is not the Government's final word, but the beginning of a phase of policy activity to work through the Review's recommendations and their consequences. Subsequent reports will be made at six-monthly intervals until the recommendations are fully implemented and an assessment of their effect can be made. This response does not stand alone but should be read alongside the Government's response to the OFT's 2006 report *The commercial use of public information*.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Office of Fair Trading (2006). *The commercial use of public information*, available at [www.offt.gov.uk/shared\\_offt/reports/consumer\\_protection/oft861.pdf](http://www.offt.gov.uk/shared_offt/reports/consumer_protection/oft861.pdf)

# RESPONSE TO SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

**Recommendation 1.** To improve service delivery and communication with the public, the Central Office of Information (COI), in partnership with the Office of Public Sector Information (OPSI), should coordinate the development of experimental partnerships between major departments and user-generated sites in key policy areas including parenting advice (Department for Education and Skills (DfES)), services for young people, and healthcare (Department of Health (DH)).

## *Accept*

This recommendation moves government from taking a passive role in this area to actively encouraging experimental partnerships between public bodies and the creators of user-generated information, in particular consulting sensitively with user groups and learning from them. Government will also consider how the insight and enthusiasm of those engaged in online self-help could inform the design, delivery and governance of public services.

COI welcomes the opportunity to work with OPSI in developing experimental partnerships between user-generated sites and major departments. COI will, on behalf of government departments, and in consultation with policy owners, identify opportunities in this area that may be developed. COI is already coordinating the development of one such service for young people with DfES, DH and the Home Office.

COI's corporate aim is to:

*enable central government and public sector bodies to secure policy objectives through achieving maximum communication effectiveness and best value for money.<sup>17</sup>*

In this context, COI will work with departments to produce an overarching strategic approach for government in this new area of communications. Through the Minister for the Cabinet Office, COI will bring this strategy for discussion to the appropriate Cabinet Committee by winter 2007.

Where resources are available, OPSI is well positioned to provide specialist advice, guidance and support to all those involved in such partnerships, in particular about intellectual property rights and the re-use of public sector information. These issues are often perceived as barriers, but such barriers are rarely insurmountable. The role for OPSI here is to encourage, inform, facilitate and reassure both departments and site creators.

These commissioning and procurement issues will be informed by the work of the Department of Trade and Industry's Effective Content Initiative.<sup>18</sup>

**Recommendation 2.** To reduce unnecessary duplication of pre-existing user-generated sites, COI should update the guidelines for minimum website standards by December 2007; departments should be strongly advised to consult the operators and users of pre-existing user-generated sites before they build their own versions.

<sup>17</sup> Central Office of Information website: [www.coi.gov.uk/aboutcoi.php](http://www.coi.gov.uk/aboutcoi.php)

<sup>18</sup> [www.dti.gov.uk/sectors/digitalcon/effectivecontent/page10175.html](http://www.dti.gov.uk/sectors/digitalcon/effectivecontent/page10175.html)

*Accept*

As part of the Government's overall policy of website rationalisation, in which COI plays a key advisory role, COI welcomes the opportunity to develop updated website guidelines by December 2007 and these will include advice to website owners to research thoroughly existing user-generated material.

**Recommendation 3.** Departments, monitored by COI, should research the scale and role of user-generated websites in their areas, with a view to either terminating government services that are no longer required, or modifying them to complement citizen-led endeavours.

*Accept*

As part of the Government's overall policy on website rationalisation, and in the interests of government as a whole, COI's Media Monitoring Unit and Research Unit will develop tools to enable government to research the scale and role of user-generated websites. Where necessary, and as part of their overall guidance to departments on website rationalisation, COI will advise departments to avoid duplication of existing user-generated material and/or to modify them to complement citizen-led endeavours.

Recommendations 2 and 3 are not, however, magic bullets to prevent poor practice. They act as useful checkpoints, but require a wider transformation in business practice and philosophy. The work of the Government Communications Group on Social Media will help drive this transformation.

**Recommendation 4.** To encourage innovation in the re-use of information by non-commercial users, UK trading funds should, in consultation with OPSI, examine the introduction of non-commercial re-use licences, along the lines of those pioneered by the BBC's Backstage project [an innovative platform for free use of information] and Google Maps.

*Accept*

The Government concurs with the Reviewers that it is no longer necessary to be a big organisation in order to achieve significant benefits from using information. The technology has progressed to the point where it is not the cost of the infrastructure but the quality and execution of the ideas that is the biggest determinant of success on the web. The challenge for government is how to encourage rather than stifle innovation through its licensing policies. Amazon<sup>19</sup> is a good example of a business with a range of web services that are free for non-commercial use, designed to seed innovation, and with the ultimate objective of spinning out commercial services.

Subject to resources being available, OPSI is keen to work with the trading funds and HM Treasury to evaluate the potential impact of a more enabling stance for non-commercial re-use, to encourage experimentation and innovation. If this evaluation proves fruitful, OPSI could mandate the provision of such licences by trading funds under the Information Fair Trader Schemes (IFTS) and as part of their delegation of authority for licensing Crown copyright.

**Recommendation 5.** To promote innovation, Ordnance Survey should, by the end of December 2007, launch its Open Space project to allow non-commercial experimentation with mapping data.

*Accept*

Ordnance Survey will look very seriously over the coming weeks at the recommendation to launch Open Space.

**Recommendation 6.** To promote innovative use of public sector information, the Department for Transport (DfT), with the support of the Chief Scientific Adviser's Committee, should complete the partially undertaken scoping and costing of a 'data mashing laboratory' and advise the Cabinet Committee of Science and Innovation on appropriate next steps.

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<sup>19</sup> [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk)

*Accept*

DfT welcomes recommendation 6 of the Review, calling for completion of the scoping work for a government 'data mashing laboratory' carried out on behalf of the Cabinet Committee of Science and Innovation. A think piece was circulated in July 2006 outlining the creation of a laboratory to develop innovative data mashing applications using public sector information. DfT has continued to engage stakeholders through a number of workshop-style events and projects demonstrating the potential of web 2.0-type technologies. DfT looks forward to completing this work over the coming months, with the support of the Chief Scientific Adviser's Committee, and will advise the Committee on appropriate ways forward.

**Recommendation 7.** To improve understanding, effective usage and take-up of government services, COI should examine options for more self-help fora for public services and publish guidance for departments on how and when to set up such fora by December 2007.

*Accept*

The Reviewers point to citizens setting up their own fora for self-help on public policy issues. It is only a matter of time until citizens set up their own fora directly for public services. There are already examples such as the self-help forum for benefits advisers at [www.rightsnet.org.uk](http://www.rightsnet.org.uk). There are risks and benefits inherent in such fora as there are in any form of advice provision, whether leaflets, helplines or electronic media. A better understanding of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in this area will better inform decision making by those designing public services.

COI welcomes the opportunity to improve understanding, effective usage and take-up of government services and will examine options for more self-help for public services. COI will look for ways to improve self-help fora offered through the current online channels, such as Directgov, and for new opportunities in the future.

**Recommendation 8.** To improve government's responsiveness to demand for public sector information, by July 2008 OPSI should create a web-based channel to gather and assess requests for publication of public sector information.

*Accept in principle, subject to funding*

OPSI (formerly Her Majesty's Stationery Office in the Cabinet Office) is now part of the National Archives, an independent body sponsored by the Ministry of Justice. National Archives/OPSI has already had its Comprehensive Spending Review settlement, independent of the Ministry of Justice. The settlement takes account of neither the OFT nor the Power of Information Review recommendations.

This is an imaginative recommendation that enables government to identify where publishing data in a more re-usable format would yield benefits and to have some idea of what those benefits might be.

The opportunities for innovative re-use are necessarily hard to predict. It is hard to know in advance what information would be most valued for re-use or what format it might best be made available in. The solution proposed in the Review is ingenious and uses the wisdom of the community to identify where and how the format barriers to re-use might be overcome.

*Recommendations 9, 10 and 12 have been addressed together for the purposes of the Government response as they are interdependent and would be implemented sequentially.*

**Recommendation 9.** By Budget 2008, government should commission and publish an independent review of the costs and benefits of the current trading fund charging model for the re-use of public sector information, including the role of the five largest trading funds, the balance of direct versus downstream economic revenue, and the impact on the quality of public sector information.

*[to be considered with:]*

**Recommendation 10.** To ensure the most appropriate supply of information for re-use, government should consistently apply its policy of marginal cost pricing for 'raw' information to all public bodies, including trading funds, except where the published economic analysis in recommendation 9 shows this does not serve the interests of UK citizens.

*[to be considered with:]*

**Recommendation 12.** To ensure that OPSI can regulate the public sector information market effectively, government should review the fit between OPSI's functions and funding, and recommend options that will ensure it is fit for purpose.

*Partially accept recommendations 9, 10 and 12*

Public information provided through trading funds plays a vital role in the UK's economy. The Reviewers are correct that a solid body of work is required before consideration is given to the future of the trading funds model. Such work will take into account the operations and realities of trading funds such as Ordnance Survey.

The Government accepts the thrust of recommendation 9. Government will undertake economic analysis of these issues to be published this year. The terms of reference for this study are currently under development but it is expected to concentrate on the availability and pricing of public sector information by trading funds. The Shareholder Executive leads the Government's relationship with a number of trading funds. The economic review will consult the Shareholder Executive as part of its work. **Only after that work has been carried out** can decisions be taken about recommendations 10 and 12. The Government's response to the OFT report, to be considered alongside this document, makes it clear that, if major changes are needed to OPSI's regulatory role, then the National Archives '*should consider what their policy priorities are and provide funding accordingly within this allocation*'. Many economic regulators charge those they regulate to recover the costs of their regulatory role. Whether such a change is needed, to bring OPSI in line with other economic regulators, will not be known until after the economic analysis but it is not precluded by the response to the OFT response.

**Recommendation 11.** To improve the supply of government information for re-use, the Better Regulation Executive should promote publication of regulatory information, and should work with OPSI to encourage publication in open formats and under licences permitting re-use.

*Accept*

Regulation is about better outcomes for society, citizens and businesses. The Review shows that new uses of information can put more power in people's hands to the advantage of existing regulatory systems by opening them up and explaining them in everyday language. Information to the public about the performance of both the regulated and the regulators increases transparency, accountability and the power of choice.

The Government welcomes these developments and commits to publishing regulatory information unless there is reasonable evidence that publication is not in the wider public interest.

In addition, the Better Regulation Executive will promote the publication of regulatory information with regulators and departments, including the following activities:

- Within the framework of annual simplification plans, the Better Regulation Executive will encourage departments to publish regulatory information where it reduces the burden of regulation.
- The Hampton Implementation Review Framework and the Regulators' Compliance Code encourage the publication by regulators of regulatory information and advice.
- The Better Regulation Executive is collaborating with the National Consumer Council to evaluate the circumstances in which information is an effective part of the regulatory landscape. In reporting it will look for opportunities to exploit regulatory information, reputation and emerging online models of information to replace existing small-print requirements and will consider further opportunities for the publication of regulatory information. This project will report in the second half of 2007.

- The Better Regulation Executive is also looking at the role of intermediaries in providing advice to businesses and voluntary sector organisations on regulation. The research will set out the economic arguments for reducing the costs to intermediaries of using information on regulation produced by government. As a result, the Better Regulation Executive will work with other departments to facilitate access to this information for re-use by third parties. This work will be completed in the second half of 2007.

In terms of open formats and licensing, it is envisaged that existing Click-Use licensing models that have been developed by OPSI can be utilised to meet this recommendation. OPSI will take the lead in developing good practice in open formats and licensing and the Better Regulation Executive will work with them in communicating this to key departments and regulators.

**Recommendation 13.** To maximise the potential value of civil servants' input into online fora, by autumn 2007 the Cabinet Office Propriety and Ethics and Government Communications teams should together clarify how civil servants should respond to citizens seeking government advice and guidance online.

*Accept*

The Government agrees with the Reviewers that, with the right guidance and training, public servants could make a valuable contribution to online debate. As the Reviewers note, there are two separate issues: the Civil Service Code, which governs the ability of individual civil servants to make public statements; and policy and practice in government communications management. The latter will determine which public servants have the right skills and remit to make public statements. This is an apposite time to review how this framework functions with new media.

**Recommendation 14.** The Digital Inclusion Team should explore the potential for promoting digital and social inclusion through the partnerships proposed in recommendation 1 and report to the Sub-Committee on Electronic Service Delivery (PSX(E)), in line with recommendation 15.

*Accept*

The Digital Inclusion Team is funded by the UK Government and based in a local authority to implement the former Social Exclusion Unit's report *Inclusion through innovation*, published in 2005.<sup>20</sup> Its focus is on how the innovative application of digital technologies, of any kind, can improve the lives and life chances of socially excluded people and deprived neighbourhoods in England.

The Team operates across and connects all sectors to stimulate innovation in the application of all varieties of digital technology, including, but not limited to, the internet. One particular focus is on the partnerships at local level between public and third sector agencies that deliver advice and services to socially disadvantaged people. Local government is making innovative use of the internet through initiatives such as the Digital Challenge competition. It is therefore right for the Digital Inclusion Team to be the organisation to look at the potential of user-generated sites to benefit such people, and it is a natural extension of its work.

The Government therefore welcomes and accepts recommendation 14, and the recommendation in the text that the Team is consulted as part of establishing the partnerships mentioned in recommendation 1. It will invite the Digital Inclusion Team to undertake the proposed work and take stock of progress by the end of 2007.

**Recommendation 15.** The Minister for the Cabinet Office, in conjunction with OPSI, should report to PSX(E) by December 2007 on departments' plans for implementing these recommendations, and by December 2008 on progress and results.

<sup>20</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2005). *Inclusion through innovation: Tackling social exclusion through new technologies: A Social Exclusion Unit final report*, available at <http://archive.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/seu/downloadaddoc2c05.pdf?id=768>

*Accept*

Government will take stock of progress across departments by the end of 2007. This response is not the Government's final word, but the beginning of a phase of policy activity to work through the Review's recommendations and their consequences. Subsequent reports will be made at six-monthly intervals until the recommendations are fully implemented and an assessment of their effect can be made.

# TABLE OF RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESPONSES

| Recommendation  | Response                     |
|---|------------------------------|
| <p><b>Recommendation 1.</b> To improve service delivery and communication with the public, the Central Office of Information (COI), in partnership with the Office of Public Sector Information (OPSI), should coordinate the development of experimental partnerships between major departments and user-generated sites in key policy areas including parenting advice (Department for Education and Skills (DfES)), services for young people, and healthcare (Department of Health (DH)).</p> | ACCEPTED                     |
| <p><b>Recommendation 2.</b> To reduce unnecessary duplication of pre-existing user-generated sites, COI should update the guidelines for minimum website standards by December 2007; departments should be strongly advised to consult the operators and users of pre-existing user-generated sites before they build their own versions.</p>   | ACCEPTED                     |
| <p><b>Recommendation 3.</b> Departments, monitored by COI, should research the scale and role of user-generated websites in their areas, with a view to either terminating government services that are no longer required, or modifying them to complement citizen-led endeavours.</p>   | ACCEPTED                     |
| <p><b>Recommendation 4.</b> To encourage innovation in the re-use of information by non-commercial users, UK trading funds should, in consultation with OPSI, examine the introduction of non-commercial re-use licences, along the lines of those pioneered by the BBC's Backstage project and Google Maps.</p>  | ACCEPTED                     |
| <p><b>Recommendation 5.</b> To promote innovation, Ordnance Survey should, by the end of December 2007, launch its Open Space project to allow non-commercial experimentation with mapping data.</p>  | ACCEPTED                     |
| <p><b>Recommendation 6.</b> To promote innovative use of public sector information, the Department for Transport, with the support of the Chief Scientific Adviser's Committee, should complete the partially undertaken scoping and costing of a 'data mashing laboratory' and advise the Cabinet Committee of Science and Innovation on appropriate next steps.</p>   | ACCEPTED                     |
| <p><b>Recommendation 7.</b> To improve understanding, effective usage and take-up of government services, COI should examine options for more self-help fora for public services and publish guidance for departments on how and when to set up such fora by December 2007.</p>   | ACCEPTED                     |
| <p><b>Recommendation 8.</b> To improve government's responsiveness to demand for public sector information, by July 2008 OPSI should create a web-based channel to gather and assess requests for publication of public sector information.</p>   | ACCEPTED, subject to funding |

| Recommendation   | Response   |
|--|--|
| <p><b>Recommendation 9.</b> By Budget 2008, government should commission and publish an independent review of the costs and benefits of the current trading fund charging model for the re-use of public sector information, including the role of the five largest trading funds, the balance of direct versus downstream economic revenue, and the impact on the quality of public sector information.</p> <p><i>[to be considered with:]</i></p> <p><b>Recommendation 10.</b> To ensure the most appropriate supply of information for re-use, government should consistently apply its policy of marginal cost pricing for 'raw' information to all public bodies, including trading funds, except where the published economic analysis in recommendation 9 shows this does not serve the interests of UK citizens.</p> <p><i>[to be considered with:]</i></p> <p><b>Recommendation 12.</b> To ensure that OPSI can regulate the public sector information market effectively, government should review the fit between OPSI's functions and funding, and recommend options that will ensure it is fit for purpose.</p> | <p>PARTIALLY ACCEPTED: The Government accepts the thrust of recommendation 9 and this year will undertake independent economic work that will be published. <b>Only after that work has been carried out</b> can decisions be taken about recommendations 10 and 12.</p> |
| <p><b>Recommendation 11.</b> To improve the supply of government information for re-use, the Better Regulation Executive should promote publication of regulatory information, and should work with OPSI to encourage publication in open formats and under licences permitting re-use.</p>  | <p>ACCEPTED</p>  |
| <p><b>Recommendation 13.</b> To maximise the potential value of civil servants' input into online fora, by autumn 2007 the Cabinet Office Propriety and Ethics and Government Communications teams should together clarify how civil servants should respond to citizens seeking government advice and guidance online.</p>  | <p>ACCEPTED</p>  |
| <p><b>Recommendation 14.</b> The Digital Inclusion Team should explore the potential for promoting digital and social inclusion through the partnerships proposed in recommendation 1 and report to the Sub-Committee on Electronic Service Delivery (PSX(E)), in line with recommendation 15.</p>   | <p>ACCEPTED</p>  |
| <p><b>Recommendation 15.</b> The Minister for the Cabinet Office, in conjunction with OPSI, should report to PSX(E) by December 2007 on departments' plans for implementing these recommendations, and by December 2008 on progress and results.</p>   | <p>ACCEPTED: In line with recommendation 15, government will take stock of progress across departments by the end of 2007.</p>   |







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