



Office of the
Deputy Prime Minister

Creating sustainable communities

Inclusion Through Innovation

Tackling Social Exclusion Through New Technologies

A Social Exclusion Unit Final Report

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Social
Exclusion
Unit

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Prime Minister's Foreword



When we came to power in 1997, I made tackling social exclusion one of this Government's priorities. We recognised that too many people were suffering from the combined effect of problems such as poverty, unemployment, poor housing, ill health and discrimination – a vicious cycle that was cutting them off from the things that most people take for granted.

We also recognised that this waste of human potential was bad for society as a whole.

Since then, we have made real progress. Our strategy to reform welfare and make work pay has delivered the lowest unemployment for a generation. There are now 700,000 fewer children living in poverty. And through focused action, we have taken on some of the most acute issues – for example, reducing the number of people sleeping rough by three quarters. But we know that there is still much to do.

Public services – and dedicated public servants – are in the front line of our efforts to reduce social exclusion. At the same time, we are implementing a major programme of reform – delivering services that are increasingly personalised to the needs of the individual, offering more choices, driving up standards, encouraging people to take more responsibility.

Our reforms of the public services go hand-in-hand with our continued commitment to social justice. For too long, public services have worked less well for disadvantaged people, who in turn have had few means of challenging the quality of the services they have been offered.

This is why I particularly welcome the Social Exclusion Unit's *Improving Services, Improving Lives* series. As we give citizens more direct influence over their public services, this process must include the most disadvantaged people in our society, so that we can offer them support that is more effective and relevant to their needs than ever before.

Tony Blair

Jim Fitzpatrick

Foreword



Improving the quality of life and life chances of the most vulnerable in society is more than an aspiration for this government - we are committed to making it a reality. As the Prime Minister has made clear in his foreword to this report, much progress has been made. And yet some people still continue to have worse life chances than the rest of the population and are also less likely to benefit from our investment in public services.

If we are to progress we must use all means possible to address exclusion. I welcome this report from the Social Exclusion Unit which shows how powerful new technology can be in improving service delivery and addressing inequality.

The UK has entered a new age, a digital age. Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are now part of every day life. More people are conducting a range of activities via the Internet, mobile phones and digital TV than ever before. New, more efficient services are available from central and local government and from voluntary organisations. This technological revolution is changing the way many of us live and work.

And yet all too often the vital role that ICT can play in transforming the lives of excluded people is overlooked, dismissed or little understood. The *Inclusion Through Innovation* report sets out to challenge this and shows how ICT can be an enormously powerful tool for transforming not just the lives of the mainstream, but also of those who are on the margins of society.

Excluded people will readily take up the opportunities presented by ICT. If effectively applied, technology can reconnect the excluded, empower and enhance their opportunities and improve the delivery of tailored services to meet their needs.

This report is the second in the Social Exclusion Unit's *Improving Services, Improving Lives* series which sets out to make sure that our reformed public services work better for the people who need them most. **The *Inclusion Through Innovation* report demonstrates that ICT is a critical and integral part of this process that must be embraced to ensure that the most vulnerable benefit equally from the digital revolution in the 21st century.**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J Fitzpatrick'.

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

Executive summary

Introduction

Significant progress has been made in tackling social exclusion in the last eight years with 700,000 fewer children living in relative low income, two million more people in work and 700,000 fewer pensions in relative poverty. But much remains to be done. Pockets of worklessness, children in homeless households, health inequalities and multiple disadvantage remain challenges. Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) offer considerable potential to support solutions to exclusion problems. Examples of innovative use of technology – information sharing, community support websites, alerts and advice sent by mobile phone – already exist in some places. For example, some schools text parents when their children are missing from school, and online benefits calculators enable people to find out what they are entitled to across all welfare benefits in one hit. But there is little evidence of serious evaluation, roll out, or awareness of successful trials. And we need to explore and understand the generic motivations, aspirations and experiences of socially excluded people in relation to ICT so that e-services and support can be more appropriately tailored to their needs.

Current government action

Government has recently set out in the Cabinet Office and Department of Trade and Industry's (DTI) *Digital Strategy* and the forthcoming e-Government Unit (eGU) *Transformational Government* report how it intends to deliver the benefits of e-government to the nation.^{1,2} Programmes like Local e-Government at the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), the National Programme for IT at the Department of Health, and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) e-Strategy signal major improvements. But we already understand from recent evidence published by the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) that the most marginalised and excluded groups find it hard to engage with mainstream services (like GPs or local authority services).³ Although these excluded groups make extensive use of public (and third sector, such as voluntary) services, problems associated with access, service design, personal capacity, and awareness mean that those most in need may benefit least. It is entirely possible that without a clear focus on exclusion, the same pattern will recur in respect to e-government – that socially excluded groups will benefit least and last.

Report themes

This report identifies areas where most benefit might be delivered to excluded groups through the transformative power of ICT, and considers how this might be achieved. It sets out evidence of the experience and aspirations of excluded people, and proposes that we should realise the opportunity to make excluded groups the major beneficiaries of e-government, and avoid creating a 'digital underclass'.

This does not mean simply “connecting everyone to the Internet.” Telephones, particularly mobile phones, community ICT access, advisers, and intermediaries all form part of a ‘multi-channel’ approach which will deliver to these groups. **ICT can be used to address social exclusion** in three main ways.

First, through **strategic planning and evaluating services** we can target services and develop efficient, tailored local plans to improve delivery. Excellent practice examples from Neighbourhood Renewal areas show, for example, significant improvements in crime reduction through strategic information sharing.

Second, **joining up services around the needs of the person** is of particular value to people who simultaneously are clients of several agencies. This is not simply a question of sharing basic information like address or personal details. It is more a matter of sharing triggers for intervention to head off crisis or decline, like the DfES Children’s Index or early warning systems for youth offenders. Developing these systems requires understanding of risk factors affecting vulnerable groups, and agreeing protocols and partnership arrangements regarding data sharing and co-ordinating actions.

Third, **personal development and active inclusion in employment, social groups, and community participation can all be helped by technology**. For example, telecare technology can be used to help older or disabled people to maintain their independence and quality of life in their own homes and communities. Websites such as ‘NetMums’, provide information, support and advice to combat isolation and empower parents including those who live on deprived estates.

Report actions

The engagement of excluded groups through the service delivery programme is also vital, not just in the design of services, but also through their active participation in e-government. Unless excluded citizens actively engage with new ways to access public services, such as the Government Connect ‘Citizens Account’, major opportunities and benefits will not be delivered to them.⁴ This report proposes actions to engage excluded citizens in the design of services to meet their needs.

The report identifies barriers which appear to be preventing progress. Evidence suggests that ‘innovations’ to tackle social exclusion are seldom evaluated, often marginalised, and have low visibility. Few people know about the successful projects already delivering. A focal point is needed to bring together good practice and initiatives worthy of wider roll out. **This report proposes an independent unit to consolidate and promote evidence of highly effective and efficient practices, and raise the political profile of the opportunities here – for example, every authority should know the top ten opportunities available.**

Essential personal information sharing around sensitive areas is often shunned as too difficult, or is wrongly considered illegal. **This report sets out action to be taken forward across Government to develop more detailed and effective guidance and support for information sharing about excluded groups, and notes the impending Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) legislation to make further progress in benefits information sharing.** A perhaps greater problem is trust and agreeing roles and responsibilities – and the development of further specific exclusion focused protocols is essential.

Finally, **access to ICT remains a critical issue**. This report proposes actions to expand public access to institutions used by excluded groups such as hostels for homeless people and community centres in deprived areas and highlights successful community development approaches to ICT engagement.

Conclusion

These actions, alongside the *Digital Strategy* and *Transformational Government* programme, will increase the likelihood that excluded groups will benefit equally from technological improvements in service delivery as well as bringing a renewed focus on the use of e-inclusion as a route to social inclusion.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction and context

Summary

This report explores the role of ICT in improving service delivery and outcomes for socially excluded groups. It focuses on the key problems faced by socially excluded groups, outlines how ICT can be used to tackle these problems, sets out the barriers to achieving this, and details actions agreed across Government to address these barriers and take this agenda forward.

This project is part of the Social Exclusion Unit's (SEU) wider work programme – *Improving Services, Improving Lives* – which aims to make public services more effective for disadvantaged people, in order to improve their life chances. The projects within this work programme have been identified using evidence from *Breaking the Cycle*, the Government's review of progress made in tackling social exclusion since 1997.¹

This report is divided into sections as follows:

- **Chapter 1** locates this report in the context of the SEU's wider work programme and of wider Government policy, and sets out the main arguments of this report.
- **Chapter 2** sets out the evidence relating to socially excluded people's experience of and attitudes towards ICT and information sharing.
- **Chapter 3** presents a series of striking examples that illustrate how ICT has been used to improve service delivery and outcomes for socially excluded groups.
- **Chapter 4** explores the user barriers to accessing services through ICT channels, and sets out the actions agreed across Government to tackle these barriers.
- **Chapter 5** examines the barriers to information sharing, and sets out agreed actions to tackle these barriers.
- **Chapter 6** considers how to take forward good practice and the role of the private and third sectors, and makes the case for a Digital Inclusion Unit for England – a cross cutting third sector agency with a remit to advance the digital inclusion agenda and disseminate good practice.*
- **Chapter 7** sets out an action plan, which details the actions that have been agreed across government in response to the issues raised in this report.

Alongside the report, we are publishing a series of annexes including an international study of technology initiatives to enhance social inclusion, and research findings from our consultation and focus groups.

* Third sector organisations are the range of institutions which occupy the space between the state and the private sector. They include small local community and voluntary groups, registered charities both large and small, and the growing number of social enterprises and co-operatives (National Audit Office, *Working with the Third Sector* (London, TSO, 2005)).

A picture of social exclusion ...

Kaliq

Kaliq is 76 years old and lives alone in a small flat. His family do not live nearby, but he uses the local community centre to meet his friends and play chess. Recently, however, Kaliq has become increasingly housebound due to health problems caused by arthritis and a heart condition – and he sometimes forgets to take his medication. Kaliq uses health, housing and benefits services, but his English is not very good and he finds it difficult filling in forms and has not claimed all the benefits he is entitled to. Kaliq does not have access to ICT at home and he isn't interested in them anyway as he feels they have no relevance for him.

Just imagine ...

Kaliq has a telecare system at home which reminds him to take medicine and get to doctors appointments.* It gives him peace of mind as he has a personal alarm which he can use to call for help in an emergency. His heart condition is improving and he has access to an interactive physiotherapy service which he makes regular use of. The system also has e-mail built into it and Kaliq gets a message most mornings from his grandchildren.

Workers at the community centre have got Kaliq into ICT and helped him learn to use computers and the Internet. At first Kaliq wasn't interested, but when someone showed him how to play chess online with people from around the world, he was hooked. He now does his food shopping online – which is cheaper than using local shops and means he does not have to carry heavy bags up to his flat. At the community centre Kaliq has been shown how to apply for benefits online and after filling in one form he discovered he was eligible for several more than he was claiming. He now receives more money and support, which has helped improve his quality of life.

But ... this is not the future – this is possible now. This report sets out the steps that make this future possible today.

What is this report about?

- 1.1 This report is about improving the quality of life and life chances of socially excluded people. Having a job, being healthy, participating in community life, having a stable home, and not being discriminated against are fundamental aspects of the aspirations of most people, and the aspirations of government for thriving and sustainable communities. This report explores the enabling and transformative powers that ICT can bring to this agenda and suggests that it is the most excluded people who may, perhaps unexpectedly, derive most benefit.

* Telecare can be defined as a service bringing health and social care directly to a user, generally in their own homes, supported by ICT, and is used to support older or disabled people to live independently (see p32 and p45).

1.2 The main argument of this report is:

- Some of the key problems faced by socially excluded people, such as multiple disadvantage, low levels of access to services, social isolation, and low motivation, can be effectively addressed using ICT. This report cites examples of innovative uses of ICT to help address the problems faced by socially excluded people (see **Chapter 3**). It highlights the importance of understanding the specific needs and attitudes of excluded people, in order to understand how ICT can best deliver these benefits (see **Chapter 2**).
- Delivering services both electronically and inclusively requires the imaginative engagement of partners within the public, private, and third sectors. Individual rights and responsibilities are also important in this context. In particular, electronically delivered services (e-services) need the consent and active engagement of excluded people to be a success. One key benefit of e-services is the level of responsibility they can confer on individuals to engage constructively with public services. As we will show in **Chapter 3**, many innovative ICT initiatives and applications are designed with a view to empowering and skilling individuals to play a more positive part in society.
- This report argues that further action is needed to increase the role of ICT in delivering services to socially excluded groups. It appears that there is currently little impetus to roll out successful projects on a broader scale, little effective evaluation, and a plethora of real or imaginary barriers that prevent e-services reaching the most excluded groups. These issues are explored further in **Chapters 5 and 6**.

Context of this report

- 1.3 *Inclusion Through Innovation* complements the *Digital Strategy*, and the related *Transformational Government* report. The *Digital Strategy* sets out the overall Government strategy to make the UK a world leader in digital technology and bridge the digital divide. *Transformational Government* outlines the overall framework for public service transformation enabled by ICT – with services designed around people and businesses, a joined up service culture and greater professionalism and leadership for ICT within the public sector (see box below).

Transformational Government: Enabled by Technology

The e-Government Unit in the Cabinet Office will shortly be issuing *Transformational Government*, a report on new opportunities provided by technology to transform the business of government. The report will set out the strategic view that will enable the UK to use technology decisively and effectively across government. Citizens, business and government itself will benefit from the transformation of public services; increased efficiency of corporate services and improved capacity and capability. An increased focus on the customers of public services, in both better service design and smarter use of delivery channels will particularly benefit socially excluded people.

- 1.4 This report provides a more detailed level of analysis of what it really means to address social exclusion through ICT, and outlines a range of new and detailed evidence about opportunities, barriers, and attitudes, which increase our understanding of how these overarching policies can be focused to reduce social exclusion (rather than simply digital exclusion).
- 1.5 This report has emerged from the findings of *Breaking the Cycle*, a stock take of the Government's progress in tackling the causes and consequences of social exclusion since 1997. *Breaking the Cycle* concluded that significant progress had been made in a number of areas, including reduced child and pensioner poverty, lower unemployment, expanded nursery education and childcare provision, improved educational attainment, and a sharp drop in the number of rough sleepers. However, it also concluded that people facing severe or multiple disadvantages are less likely to benefit from policies. In some cases they tend not to use services as much as others do, and sometimes when they do they are less likely to gain from them. *Breaking the Cycle* identified this as a crucial challenge for public service delivery: "we need to improve service design and delivery to extend the reach of what works to those who need it most."
- 1.6 **This is true for e-services as much as for traditional services.** The risk to be addressed is that excluded groups will increasingly get a worse deal from e-government. The opportunity is to ensure that they benefit the most. **Annex A** summarises the key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) that this report has explored as part of its analysis.
- 1.7 This project is part of the SEU's wider work programme, *Improving Services, Improving Lives*, which aims to make public services more effective for disadvantaged people to improve their life chances. The suite of projects within this work programme are summarised below. Key themes for improving service delivery to these groups were identified in *Improving Services, Improving Lives*. These are:
- Information and communication
 - Interactions with frontline staff
 - Building personal capacity in those who use services
 - Joining up services
 - The role of the third sector
 - Levers and incentives – including target and funding regimes
- 1.8 These principles incorporate the Government's priorities for public service reform. The Government has already set in place national standards within a framework of clear accountability, designed to ensure that citizens have the right to high quality services wherever they live.*

* Earlier this year the Government set out three principles underpinning the next phase of public service reform: universal provision with personalised delivery, high standards flexibly delivered, and equity and choice (see *Putting people at the heart of public services*, Office of Public Service Reform (2005)).

Improving Services, Improving Lives – five projects

- **Disadvantaged adults** – A project to make mainstream public services more effective for three broad disadvantaged groups within the adult population: people with low levels of literacy; disabled people and people with long-term health conditions; and people from certain ethnic minority groups.
- **Inclusion through innovation** – A project to explore how ICT can help to address the needs of disadvantaged groups. It aims to maximise the use of ICT in support of those who face multiple or entrenched problems, and to address inequalities arising between people who are able to make use of ICT and those who are not.
- **Young adults with complex needs** – A project to improve services for young adults, particularly those facing problems such as homelessness, mental health conditions and substance misuse. It aims to reduce the risk of these young adults falling through a gap between child and adult services, and to help them make the transition to adulthood.
- **Excluded older people** – A project putting renewed focus on tackling isolation and social exclusion among older people. Key issues for the project are: early support and preventative services, rather than crisis interventions when action could be too late; greater control and choice for older people to avoid untimely dependency; and joining up services, from benefits to housing to health.
- **Disadvantaged people who move frequently** – A project to improve service delivery for people who experience a high degree of instability in their housing circumstances. It aims to promote: tailored services which meet individual needs in different locations; support for people who want to settle and avoid a cycle of homelessness; and the creation of sustainable communities in which both those who move frequently and those who are settled respect each other.

Defining ICT and the digital divide

- 1.9 There is a tendency in the debate about ICT and e-government services to assume that ICT means computers and the Internet, and that addressing the 'digital divide', or disparity between those who have access to and use of ICT and those who do not, simply means getting more socially excluded people online. However, the issues and opportunities are much wider than this.
- 1.10 First, ICT in this context need not be new or novel. Indeed evidence suggests that the majority of people prefer to contact public and private services using what is now a very sophisticated, if somewhat understated ICT device – the telephone.* The more recent development of mobile phones has built on this popularity, and the fact that very high proportions of certain excluded groups own mobile phones now provides

* A MORI survey commissioned for the e-Citizen National Project (see: <http://www.e-citizen.gov.uk>) found that the telephone was the most popular method of contacting council services (68 per cent of respondents had ever used this method) – followed by a personal visit to council offices (36 per cent), writing a letter (24 per cent) and any e-communication (12 per cent) (see *e-citizenship: What people want*, MORI for Norwich City Council, 2004). At a national level, NHS Direct is a successful telephone service that facilitates access to health services and is available to excluded groups who may not be registered with a GP.

enormous opportunities to improve contact, communication, and engagement with them (see **Chapter 2**).^{*} The services provided by a phone are identical whether an individual is calling from a castle or a caravan.

- 1.11 Second, the ICT systems used to support socially excluded people are often ‘back office’ systems that support better service delivery by service providers. Innovative service delivery systems that facilitate electronic information sharing, better management of information and electronic work management systems are invisible to service users, except in the outcome of better services.
- 1.12 Third, some of the more obviously present ICT hardware like telecare, CCTV security cameras, remote health monitoring, and smart cards, can provide immediate advantages to excluded people but do not require the user to have any technical knowledge or training to derive benefit.[†]
- 1.13 The *Digital Strategy* recognises these issues. For example, it acknowledges that the telephone, particularly the mobile phone, and personal face to face contact with service providers remain the main ways by which people, including those who are socially excluded, choose to conduct their business. The development of ‘multi-channel’ access to services, whereby individuals can choose to access services in a way that suits them, means that increasingly there will more ways in which to do business and realise the benefits of ICT and Internet services. Today services can be accessed and delivered through digital TV, mobile phones, Internet kiosks and crucially, through a range of personal and skilled advisers who help excluded people gain access to e-services.[‡]
- 1.14 So it is clear that realising the benefits of ICT and e-services is **about more than getting everybody online**. The digital divide is about more than not having a personal computer (PC) or access to broadband, although these issues are important and are further explored in **Chapter 4**. It encompasses a wider set of issues surrounding content, skills, and the wider social consequences of the increasing use of ICT in all aspects of life. For example, the British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (BECTA) assert that “digital divides involve a complex web of interconnected social, economic and cultural factors that cannot be fully captured by a definition that focuses solely on access or ownership.”² It is important now to clarify what ICT really does to address social exclusion.

* The Ofcom Consumer Panel Survey found that 79 per cent of UK adults owned a mobile phone – and that the rate of ownership was similar for those from low income households, at 78 per cent (see Ofcom, *Consumers and the communications market: where we are now*, 2004). Available at: http://www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk/publications/consumer_panel_report.pdf

† A smart card is a plastic card about the size of a credit card, with an embedded microchip that can be loaded with data, used to transact with and access services, make electronic cash payments, and for other applications (e.g. the Oyster card used by Transport for London).

‡ For example, the Carpenters Connect project in Newham provides residents of the Carpenters estate with access to a range of services through digital TV (see: <http://www.newham.org.uk/wired/>).

What does ICT do to address social exclusion?

- 1.15 First, **economic benefits**: ICT is one of the **motors of increased economic performance and greater efficiency**, and can be a driver for both increased employment opportunities and greater overall wealth in society, to the benefit of all citizens including those at risk of exclusion. While this is central to addressing the deprivation agenda, this report does not deal with this issue in depth as it is addressed by the existing *Digital Strategy*.
- 1.16 Second, **the job market**: ICT **changes the nature of a considerable number of jobs**, in a way that allows the development of a more inclusive labour market. It introduces opportunities for home working, more flexible working patterns, better engagement in the workforce of disabled people and a range of new jobs. This agenda is already well covered by mainstream DfES and DWP policies around developing a skilled workforce, so again will not be covered in depth in this report.
- 1.17 Third, **strategic planning and service targeting**: ICT enables a better understanding of the nature, incidence, and causes of social exclusion and facilitates improved planning to address it. Through the collection and sharing of information we can develop a **much better understanding of the patterns of social exclusion** and the needs of excluded people. This allows the development and monitoring of evidence based social exclusion **strategies** and neighbourhood renewal strategies which can much more effectively and **efficiently** target services where they are needed.
- 1.18 Fourth, **improving access to services**: ICT introduces new ways for people to access services, particularly in the context of the development of e-government. This provides opportunities to develop a more flexible approach to service **availability**, and to the way services are **delivered** (for example, online 24/7, in large font or different languages). This includes:
- *Information: Finding out what is on offer* – the online provision of information about services such as employment, health, and social support. This provides a one-way channel of communication from the Government to citizens, although it can be more interactive and allow the user to conduct focused searching for information.
 - *Transaction: doing business remotely* – the process whereby a citizen can interact and transact with a service. This includes applying for a benefit or service by telephone or online, or making a payment of a parking fine using a secure Internet link.
 - *Interaction: keeping in touch electronically* – two way communication between service providers and their clients, which includes e-mailing or texting information and reminders.
- 1.19 Fifth, it provides opportunities to build **more effective, integrated, personalised, and customer focused services**, by providing support and new opportunities for service providers to better understand and engage with their customers. This includes the type of ‘back office’ improvements mentioned above, which allow staff to share information about shared clients who have multiple problems. It also includes ICT driven support for front line staff, such as laptops taken on visits to housebound people, which provide immediate access to background case information, or online guidance to help staff who work with people who have complex needs.

1.20 Sixth, **building personal capacity**: ICT **helps individuals to address some of the key drivers** of social exclusion which reduce life chances as set out in examples in **Chapter 3**. These key drivers include:

- Early years disadvantage
- Educational underachievement
- Worklessness
- Homelessness
- Health and health inequalities
- Crime (and being a victim of crime)

1.21 Finally, **building social networks and civic participation**: Entertaining content, for example, news, music and games, opportunities for low-cost shopping, and building and maintaining social contact with others are some of the most commonly cited reasons why the majority of people use the Internet. The opportunity to pursue individual interests and activities online often serves as the ‘hook’ or incentive that initially engages people with the Internet. The opportunities for communication with friends, family, or new communities of people who share interests is one of the most striking and liberating aspects of ICT; whether this is lonely or isolated grandparents receiving e-mailed pictures of grandchildren, or disadvantaged people with an interest in football finding like-minded enthusiasts online. Equally community participation and democracy through new technology is slowly but steadily emerging in local communities, sometimes very effectively involving those who were previously indifferent or excluded.

The evidence

1.22 This report examines the role of ICT in improving service delivery and addressing inequality for socially excluded groups from a range of perspectives. These include service users, service providers, local authorities, and the private and third sectors. It considers how progress so far matches the aspirations of the top down policies.

1.23 Five pieces of external research were directly commissioned by the Social Exclusion Unit as part of this study, and are made available alongside this report:

- *Inclusion Through Innovation: tackling social exclusion through new technologies – An analysis of consultation responses*, which reports on a wide ranging consultation exercise across the public, private and third sectors. Aimed at practitioners working with socially excluded people, it ran between November 2004 and February 2005 and distils views from the 261 responses received (**Annex C**).³
- *Inclusion Through Innovation: tackling social exclusion through new technologies: Qualitative research report* with findings from seven focus groups with socially excluded people about their experience and perceptions of ICT (**Annex D**).⁴

- *An international study of technology initiatives to enhance social inclusion: Extending the reach of what works*, which examines excellent international examples where ICT is used effectively to address social exclusion (**Annex E**).⁵
- *Information and Social Exclusion Mapping*, which examines the range of information available electronically that is of central relevance to developing a social exclusion strategy in a local authority area (**Annex F**).⁶
- *Business case tool*, which provides a template for organisations to evaluate the business case and cost/benefits for ICT enabled initiatives which address social exclusion themes (**Annex G**).⁷

1.24 One additional relevant research report is also published alongside this report:

- *Data Sharing for Neighbourhood Renewal: Lessons from the North West*, which was commissioned by the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (NRU) and examines good practice in sharing available information in order to plan improvements in deprived neighbourhoods (**Annex H**).⁸

1.25 Further evidence was gathered from a series of visits to projects throughout the UK and workshops with a wide range of stakeholders held as part of SEU programme of regional road shows throughout England in Autumn 2004.

Overview of this report

1.26 This report is divided into the following sections:

- This chapter locates this report in the context of the SEU's wider work programme and of wider Government policy, and sets out the main arguments of this report.
- **Chapter 2** sets out the evidence relating to socially excluded people's experience of and attitudes towards ICT and information sharing.
- **Chapter 3** presents a series of striking examples that demonstrate how ICT has been used to improve service delivery and outcomes for socially excluded groups.
- **Chapter 4** explores the user barriers to accessing services through ICT channels, and sets out the actions agreed across Government to tackle these barriers.
- **Chapter 5** examines the barriers to information sharing, and sets out agreed actions to tackle these barriers.
- **Chapter 6** considers how to take forward good practice, and the role of the private and third sectors and makes the case for the creation of a Digital Inclusion Unit for England – a cross cutting third sector agency with a remit to advance the digital inclusion agenda and disseminate good practice.
- **Chapter 7** sets out an action plan, detailing the actions that have been agreed across Government in response to the issues raised in this report.

CHAPTER 2

The user perspective

Summary

This chapter explores the views and experiences of socially excluded people in relation to ICT and information sharing. It draws on the findings of a series of SEU commissioned focus groups and a range of external research. Key findings include:

- Socially excluded groups currently use a variety of ICT, particularly mobile phones, for a diverse range of purposes.
- There are a number of significant barriers that impede wider use of ICT by socially excluded groups. These include a need to address preliminary needs before engaging with ICT, cost constraints, barriers to using public access points, and a perceived lack of relevant content.
- This points to the need for a ‘multi-channel’ approach to delivering services to socially excluded groups that recognises that different people access services in different ways.
- Socially excluded groups are receptive to the concept of information sharing and are more concerned that the desired outcome of their dealings with the state are arrived at swiftly than their information is being shared.

Introduction

- 2.1 If ICT is to address the needs of socially excluded groups, it is vital that policies to advance the role of ICT in service delivery are attuned to the specific needs, attitudes, aspirations, and concerns of these groups.
- 2.2 The *Digital Strategy* and *Transformation Government* strategy are examples of current central government policies that have adopted such an approach. Individual government departments are also engaged in a host of initiatives to advance e-service delivery within their own service areas, which are summarised in the box below. However, to maximise the take up of e-services among socially excluded groups, it is necessary for government to adopt a joined up approach that recognises the key cross-cutting drivers of social exclusion and the related barriers to accessing services.

Government initiatives

The **Department for Work and Pensions** has set out in its five year plan a series of steps to move towards developing a long term client focused approach to its customers, so that it can plan services and focus effort on individuals based on the history of their contact with the Department. For example, it will make better use of longitudinal data to cut through form filling and better target benefits to prompt where they suspect a pensioner is not receiving Pension Credit but could be entitled to it.

http://www.dwp.gov.uk/publications/dwp/2005/5_yr_strat/

The **Department for Education and Skills** has set out plans in its e-Strategy for the use of digital and interactive technologies to achieve a more personalised approach within all areas of education and children's services. The e-Strategy will build capacity to maintain individual educational records for all pupils, allowing a detailed and personalised means to track their educational progress.

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/e-strategy/>

Department of Health is implementing the National Programme for IT (NPfIT) which is creating a national information infrastructure for the NHS. This includes the NHS Care Record Service and the 'Choose and Book' electronic booking service to support the delivery of care that is responsive to the needs and wishes of patients and their carers and supports patient choice. <http://www.connectingforhealth.nhs.uk>

The **Home Office** is developing the National Offender Management Information System (NOMIS), a new end-to-end offender management system that supports staff working in the National Offender Management Service (NOMS). NOMS brings together the work of correctional services. It ensures that court sentences are effectively implemented across organisational boundaries and that the focus is on end-to-end management of the offender. NOMS will also be responsible for designing interventions and services for offenders that are designed to reduce re-offending and reconviction and protect the public.

<http://www.noms.homeoffice.gov.uk/>

The **Office of the Deputy Prime Minister** is in the process of completing the National Programme for Local e-Government which has equipped local authorities with the means of delivering services electronically to all its citizens.

<http://www.localgovnp.org/>

- 2.3 This chapter presents the findings from original qualitative research commissioned by the SEU to gauge the views of socially excluded groups in relation to their personal experiences of ICT, barriers to access and usage, and information sharing. It also draws on wider research within this field conducted by organisations such as the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and the Office of Communications (Ofcom).
- 2.4 The research findings support the need for organisations that deliver services to socially excluded groups to develop multi-channel delivery strategies that recognise the diverse ways in which such groups are able to access services. Our findings also suggest that socially excluded groups are receptive to information sharing where there are clear improvements in service delivery outcomes.

How do excluded groups view ICT?

2.5 In October 2004, the Social Exclusion Unit commissioned NOP Social & Political to carry out a series of qualitative research focus groups among people from socially excluded groups. The findings of this research are made available alongside this report in **Annex D**. The overall purpose of this research was to ascertain respondent's experiences of and attitudes towards both ICT and information sharing. Seven workshops, which included a 'hands on' element that enabled participants to use ICT such as mobile phones and the Internet, were carried out among groups of asylum seekers and refugees, disabled people, people leaving institutions,* homeless people, Gypsies and Travellers, young people with low basic skills, and socially excluded older people. The workshop format allowed respondents to express their spontaneous views before engaging with relevant ICTs and receiving information, enabling a more informed discussion to emerge.

Extensive use

2.6 All respondents to the research were using ICT in one form or another. In particular there was a **high take-up of mobile phones** across the groups, although older respondents (those aged over 50) were less likely to use them.

"They see me with my mobile phone and they are not going to think I am homeless. But at the same time as saying that, I don't know a homeless person who hasn't got a mobile phone!" (Homeless people, 18-45, London)

"You'd feel like your left arm's been cut off without your mobile! If I forget my phone, it's like I've forgotten my heart! I'm the text queen. I can do it without even looking." (People leaving institutions, 25-55, London)

2.7 Overall, ICT was viewed fairly positively. It was seen as:

- Providing new sources of entertainment
- Allowing more immediate communication with others – for example, asylum seekers and refugees used the Internet extensively to keep in touch with family and friends
- Giving people greater independence and freedom
- Providing a greater range of channels for accessing services

"I use it for incoming calls, for jobs, hostel places. You don't want to be in the wrong place at the wrong time and miss out on a place." (Homeless people, 18-45, London)

"I would say with a computer the world is your oyster. Whatever you want to know, you can find out on the computer. I am into watercolours. I can visit all the galleries. I can look at all the pictures in the galleries if I want. There are all sorts you can do." (Socially excluded older people, 65+, Morecambe)

* People leaving institutions – for example, people who have recently left hospital.

- 2.8 Only a small minority of respondents had personal access to personal computers, e-mail and the Internet at home. The highest levels of experience using PCs were found among respondents in the homeless people, asylum seekers and refugees, and disabled people groups. Characteristically, respondents in each of these groups had reasonably close relationships with community centres serving their particular needs such as refugee support centres, homeless shelters, and centres for visually impaired people. These community centres often provided an important channel of access to and training in ICT.
- 2.9 Respondents in the other groups tended to have lower awareness of external channels of access, such as community centres, libraries and Internet cafés. Many respondents had never used a PC and few were using them on a regular basis. Use of PCs was lowest among the socially excluded older people, and the Gypsy and Traveller groups.
- 2.10 Across the groups, respondents who did use PCs did so for a wide range of activities, including accessing the Internet for shopping, news, chat rooms, and job searches. Usually, those with more experience of using ICTs had a more positive view of them, while those with less experience tended to be more negative.

“I am not on the Internet, I won’t go on it. I can’t see what I would get out of it.”
(Socially excluded older people, 65+, Morecambe)

- 2.11 The focus group findings broadly correlate with wider research exploring access to and take up of ICT. For example, the high rate of mobile phone ownership and usage among respondents is in line with the latest data from MORI’s *Technology Tracker* (a monthly report based on a representative sample of approximately 4,000 adults in Great Britain aged 15 and above), which revealed that in August 2005, 76 per cent of respondents from socio-economic group D/E had used a mobile phone compared with an average of 83 per cent for all social groups.*¹ Similarly, the Ofcom *Consumer Panel Report*, which explored low income consumer attitudes towards a wide range of ICTs, found that 78 per cent of low income households aged under 65 owned a mobile phone compared with an average of 79 per cent among all households aged under 65.² Among respondents aged over 65 this figure was only 37 per cent, which was echoed by the relatively low mobile phone take up rate among older members of our focus groups.
- 2.12 The focus group research also reflects the wider patterns of Internet access and usage, which show that levels of Internet access are related strongly to social class and household income. For example, MORI’s *Technology Tracker* reveals that in August 2005 just 33 per cent of respondents from socio-economic group D/E had used the Internet anywhere, compared with an average of 59 per cent. The ONS reports that in 2002/03 only 12 per cent of UK households with a gross household income below £123 a week (the lowest income decile group) had access to the Internet. In contrast, 85 per cent of households with gross income of over £1,085 (the highest income decile group) had access.³

* Socio Economic Group classifications: A – Professional, B – Intermediate, C1 – Skilled non-manual, C2 – Skilled manual, D – Partly skilled, E – Unskilled.

Barriers to using ICT

2.13 Respondents cited four key barriers to using ICT. First, certain groups had **preliminary needs** that they felt would have to be addressed before they could consider accessing and using ICT. These included:

- Low levels of literacy (Gypsies and Travellers)
- Poor English language skills (asylum seekers and refugees)
- Obtaining leave to remain in the UK (asylum seeker and refugees)
- Obtaining housing and employment (homeless people)

“Well I couldn’t really do anything on computers without being able to read, could I? There are a lot of Travellers that cannot read and write.”

(Gypsies and Travellers, 18-45, London)

2.14 External research supports the importance of addressing preliminary needs. For example, possession of relevant skills and knowledge is clearly correlated with indicators of social exclusion, age, social class and education levels. Twenty four per cent of people receiving means-tested benefit lack basic literacy skills and 79 per cent of people receiving means-tested benefits lack practical ICT skills.⁴ In addition confidence is a key factor associated with successful engagement with ICT, with 33 per cent of all non Internet users lacking the knowledge or confidence to use the Internet.⁵

2.15 This issue is already being directly addressed. The DfES have labelled ICT the third basic skill.⁶ For children and young people at least, higher levels of ICT literacy and experience directly correlate with the volume of opportunities taken up online.⁷ The DfES recently launched its e-Strategy which focuses on what technology can do for informing and advising citizens, for supporting children, young people and adult learners and for transforming the experience of learning.⁸

2.16 Second, **perceived cost** emerged as a key barrier to use of ICT across the groups, especially with regard to PCs, e-mail and the Internet. In particular:

- ICT equipment, such as PCs, was seen as prohibitively expensive
- Ongoing monthly subscription charges, for example to Internet Service Providers, were perceived as unaffordable
- Price of software to aid visually-impaired users was also viewed as a barrier
- The cost of using computer terminals in libraries, community centres and Internet cafés was seen as a barrier

“You have to pay to go on the computer too. It is like 50p an hour.”

(Young people with low basic skills, 16-24, Morecambe)

2.17 External research confirms that cost is a key barrier to the take up of ICT:

- **People living in households in the highest income decile group are seven times more likely to have home access to the Internet than those in the lowest decile group.**⁹
- The gap in home Internet access is narrowing between households in areas of higher deprivation and those in less deprived areas, but increases in take-up of home Internet access have been entirely among the C1 and A/B groups.¹⁰
- The rate of connection among the D/E groups has remained around the 20 per cent level since 2001.¹¹
- Single parent households are also significantly less likely to have home Internet access than households with two adults.¹²

2.18 Ofcom's *Consumer Panel Report* also found that **low income households are more than twice as likely as the UK average to report 'involuntary exclusion', which has been defined as those who do not have access, do not intend to get access, and who have not made this decision through choice; instead citing reasons relating to affordability or lack of coverage.**¹³ However, evidence suggests that perceptions of cost may be widely inaccurate.*

2.19 Third, there were barriers with regard to where respondents could **access** computers, e-mail and the Internet outside the home, including:

- Lack of awareness of available resources (e.g. libraries, community centres)
- Providers closing down (rural locations)
- Overly restrictive time limits placed on use (e.g. 30 minute time-slots in library)
- Lack of software to aid visually-impaired users (Disabled people)

"I didn't know you could use computers in libraries."

(Disabled people, 25-55, Bradford)

* P. Foley, *Connecting people: tackling exclusion?* (De Montfort University, 2003) Available at: www.btplc.com/Societyandenvironment/Reports/connectingpeople.pdf. This study found that there was a general perception among nearly all 130 focus group participants from excluded groups that a new computer costs about £800. In reality a reasonable computer (brand name – 1.8GHz, 128MB, 40GB with a CD player and monitor) can be obtained for less than £400. There were also relatively high perceptions of the cost of monthly Internet access; on average non-users thought this would cost £28 per month. In reality the participants interviewed who had been using the Internet for less than a year estimated that they were paying £11.90 per month for Internet access.

2.20 Despite this perception, action to address accessibility barriers has been underway for some time, since the launch of 'UK online' public Internet access centres in 2000 (since April 2003 managed by the University for Industry (Ufi)). Today 95 per cent of households are within 5km of a UK online centre and virtually all households in the UK are within 10km of a UK online or 'learndirect' centre. In parallel with the development of UK online, the People's Network has funded access to computers through libraries. Evaluation evidence reveals that UK online centres have successfully promoted interest in using the Internet; introduced people to learning; and helped people develop the initial confidence and skills to do both.¹⁴ However, the institutional barriers that prevent some excluded people from entering facilities such as a library or adult education institution are unlikely to disappear merely because a site of free or low cost ICT access has been located within them.*¹⁵

2.21 Fourth, respondents identified a lack of **relevant content**. This barrier was particularly prevalent in relation to PCs, and the Internet.

"Why do you feel compelled to jump on that bandwagon? I can't work it out personally. No, I can't. Unless that's your line of work, I can't see the point."
(People leaving institutions, 25-55, London)

2.22 Research evidence suggests that the clearest area of market failure with regard to digital inclusion is in **content provision**. As a report for Digital Europe notes, "there is considerable scepticism that the private sector will take the risk and invest in content for excluded groups."¹⁶ Other reports concur on the general shortage of content to motivate disadvantaged groups to use the Internet.¹⁷ For example, ONS data reveals that in the UK 43 per cent of non-users state they are 'not interested, do not need to, or do not want to use the Internet'.¹⁸ Evaluation of UK online centre users has also confirmed that by far the biggest barrier to accessing the Internet is lack of interest and motivation, closely linked to a lack of perceived need.¹⁹

2.23 In terms of service delivery, there are lessons to take forward from this research. It is clear that while socially excluded groups face significant barriers to accessing and using certain types of ICT such as PCs and the Internet, they more readily access and use others, notably mobile phones. There is a danger that as central and local government increasingly make their services available online, this will be to the detriment of those who are unable to or do not wish to access the Internet. **It is vital that service providers recognise the need to make best use of the technology with which people are most comfortable, or which they can most easily afford. A multi-channel approach, which recognises these diverse needs, would therefore be preferable to reliance on one form of ICT or channel of delivery.**

Perceived risks of using the Internet

2.24 Respondents, particularly those with less experience of using the Internet, expressed concern over the security of their information online and about levels of Internet pornography and crime such as credit card fraud and viruses. They tended not to have online bank accounts and expressed a resistance to this due to fears over identity theft and hacking.

* For example, an evaluation of UK online centres found that although 74 per cent of centre users were classed as 'digitally excluded'; only six per cent of centre users were from the most excluded groups; that is those people who fell into three or more of the six target groups named in the programme prospectus. Third sector based centres had a significantly higher success rate in attracting the target groups. See end note 10.

“I don’t trust it. There are hackers out there, they do get your information. That’s it, boom! Your details are stolen.” (People leaving institutions, 25-55, London)

“Is [the Internet] not a dangerous thing to have if you have got children coming into your house? You see in newspapers about them getting onto these chat lines and paedophiles.” (Socially excluded older people, 65+, Morecambe)

- 2.25 In contrast, the minority of respondents with experience of online banking and shopping were less concerned about the security of their personal information and none had experienced any Internet fraud.

“It’s no different to the postman opening your letters when your credit card bill comes through. What difference does it make whether he’s going to get it on the screen or on a bit of paper in front of him. If somebody wants that information, it’s available to them, whether it’s on computer or not.” (People leaving institutions, 25-55, London)

- 2.26 The Internet is a powerful educational and social tool for children and vulnerable adults. However as with any tool, there are a small number of people who seek to exploit it. To combat the threat these people pose to children using the Internet, the Home Secretary created a Task Force on Child Protection on the Internet to bring together Government, child protection organisations, online industries and law enforcement in partnership. The Task Force has, among other things, developed and run public awareness campaigns, developed models of good practice for providers of various Internet services, developed training for professionals and proposed changes to legislation. Task Force members are currently working with the British Standards Institute to develop a kitemark standard for child protection software.

- 2.27 In addition, to extend and provide a focal point for this partnership, the Government has announced it will create a new multi-agency centre, affiliated to the new Serious Organised Crime Agency, by April 2006. The centre will provide a 24/7 response to potential abuse, co-ordinate intelligence, act as a centre of excellence for local agencies and deliver crime prevention and reduction strategies to reduce the harm caused by online child abuse.

Views on information sharing

- 2.28 Across the focus group sample there was little awareness of what information sharing actually involved and when it might occur, either in a commercial or a governmental context. There was also little awareness of the legislation and regulations that restrict information sharing.

- 2.29 Information sharing was not a major source of concern within any of the focus groups. However, certain types of information were seen as requiring greater protection and privacy. For most, this included medical and financial information. Higher levels of concern were also expressed where potentially compromising information as to illness, debt or minor criminal offences might be shared with employers. For example, one person commented:

“I don’t think they need medical information. If I am applying for a grant to go on a singing course, why do they want to know if I have three boils on my head? If it is relevant, OK.” (Disabled people, 25-55, Bradford)

2.30 The most frequently recalled instances of information sharing involved the financial services industry. Many respondents had received sales calls from banks and insurance companies they were not currently using. They were perturbed that sales people knew their name, personal details and details of financial services they had purchased. There was widespread uncertainty about how these companies had got hold of their financial details and greater restrictions on companies sharing this information were requested.

“If the Government wants to share information then fair enough. But if it is for commercial reasons, or anything to make money, then for me that ain’t a good thing.”
(People leaving institutions, 25-55, London)

2.31 Most respondents had a high level of dependency on the state. Therefore, while there was an assumption that government departments and agencies did share information with one another while processing applications (e.g. for housing or benefits), this was largely seen as benign and necessary and levels of concern were low.

“If you go to your own GP with a problem and then they pass the information on to the hospital, that’s information sharing. And that’s got to be a good thing.”
(People leaving institutions, 25-55, London)

2.32 Across the sample, there were frequent reports of government departments and agencies dealing with respondent’s enquiries and applications in an inefficient manner. These included applicants for pensions having to complete similar forms for different agencies, applicants for social housing having to fill in new application forms each year, and neighbouring Jobcentres being unable to access information held by each other.

“Nine times out of ten they are sending you more forms because your previous ones haven’t been received. If you are vulnerable you feel it is just another stressful thing you don’t need. If you are blind you have to ask people to do this that and the other, it is degrading.”
(Disabled people, 25-55, Bradford)

2.33 Respondents struggled to recall situations in which they had been asked to give consent to information sharing when dealing with government agencies. Given their dependency on the state and their focus on outcome rather than process, most did not think that providing consent was essential. Rather, the vast majority were more concerned that the desired outcome of their dealings with the state (e.g. receiving benefit or pension money) was arrived at swiftly, than that their information was being shared between departments.

“You do want to get things done quickly. It’s horrible waiting round, especially when money’s involved. I don’t think people mind if social services share information about you, as long as things get done.”
(Socially excluded older people, 65+, Morecambe)

“They patronise you. They don’t put it on computer and then when you go again somebody else will see you and they say ‘we don’t know nout about it.’”
(Disabled people, aged 25 to 55, Bradford)

Conclusions

- 2.34 This chapter has shown that overall, socially excluded people positively engage with certain types of ICT. This is not confined to groups, such as younger people, who have traditionally been perceived as being enthusiastic users of ICT. Indeed encouragingly our focus groups and other research confirm that ICT, in its various forms, is used by a very wide range of people in society including among groups who have traditionally been regarded as digitally excluded.
- 2.35 Significant barriers, however, impede wider use of ICT, including a need for people to address preliminary needs before engaging with ICT, actual and perceived cost constraints, barriers to using public access channels, and a perceived lack of relevant content. Action already in hand to address some of these recognised issues has been outlined in this chapter.
- 2.36 The views expressed by focus group respondents, coupled with findings of the external research reviewed by this project, point to the need for organisations to adopt a multi-channel strategy to delivering services and information. Such a strategy recognises the diverse ways in which people use technology and their ability to access services through different channels.
- 2.37 Without this approach the most excluded risk being denied access to services that are only delivered through electronic channels. It is vital that service providers, who deliver public information and services through the Internet, continue to devote resources to providing a high quality service via alternative platforms that include more traditional channels such as printed media, telephone, and outreach worker. This will enable people who do not use the Internet to continue to access the services they require.
- 2.38 **Chapters 4, 5 and 6** will highlight the actions required to address the barriers raised in this chapter. To begin with, **Chapter 3** sets out existing good practice and the potential of ICT to address social exclusion problems.

CHAPTER 3

What's possible and what works

Summary

This chapter presents a selection of striking initiatives that illustrate the potential ICT has to address the problems faced by socially excluded groups. The structure follows the 'uses of ICT to address social exclusion' that were set out in **Chapter 1**. These are:

- Strategic planning and service targeting
- Improving access to services
- Providing opportunities to build more effective, integrated, personalised, and customer focused services
- Building personal capacity
- Building social networks and civic participation

This chapter concludes with a 'Top Ten' list of priority ICT based initiatives that we recommend local authorities implement in order to improve service delivery and outcomes for socially excluded groups.

Introduction

- 3.1 This chapter uses a wide range of current practical examples to demonstrate the ways in which ICT can be used to tackle social exclusion. Throughout this project we have identified numerous examples of striking and innovative projects and initiatives: this chapter does not aim to provide a comprehensive stock take of current good practice; rather it aims to provide a flavour of some of the excellent work taking place within this field.
- 3.2 All examples included in this chapter and other initiatives explored throughout the development of this report are detailed more fully in the following annexes:
- **Annex I:** The 'Innovative examples annex' cites numerous examples found as part of this study.
 - **Annex C:** The analysis of SEU consultation responses, conducted by MORI, lists examples of good practice cited by respondents.
 - **Annex E:** The international study of technology initiatives to enhance social inclusion, conducted by IECRC, cites international examples of good practice.

- 3.3 This chapter, alongside the international study cited above, includes examples of excellent practice from other countries that we consider to be of direct relevance to the themes addressed by this report. It is recognised that the context of another country's social and economic structure may make direct read-across difficult. However, the examples selected here are sufficiently powerful to merit inclusion.
- 3.4 The initiatives cited in this chapter focus mainly on specific excluded groups or issues rather than national programmes that focus on more generic problems. This is to illustrate the different issues involved in bringing ICT enabled services or solutions to particular client groups. The structure of this chapter follows the overview of the ways in which ICT can address social exclusion as set out in **Chapter 1**.

ICT initiatives that tackle social exclusion

Strategic planning and service targeting

Housing market renewal and tracking neighbourhood change 'Liverpool Asset Management Project' (LAMP) collects information from partner agencies, co-ordinated through the Local Strategic Partnership. This enables joint planning between the council and registered social landlords, making use of regularly updated information on vacant properties. This data along with a set of socio-economic indicators are used to monitor local housing market change and inform strategic thinking.¹

- 3.5 Understanding local patterns of social exclusion enables faster, more efficient and effective planning and delivery of services where they are needed most. **Better planning of services for individuals with particularly chaotic lifestyles** has been achieved by the 'Combined Homelessness and Information Network' (CHAIN).² This web based database of rough sleepers in London contains information, collated by outreach workers, about an individual's support needs and history. Their use of services and movement in and out of homelessness can be tracked, enabling agencies to co-ordinate service delivery, target resources and monitor and evaluate the outcomes of services or interventions.
- 3.6 Effective use of both national and local information can help **devise local strategies to combat unemployment**. Jobcentre Plus GIS (Geographical Information System) tools have been piloted in south-east and north London to map and analyse the location and characteristics of benefit claimants. This information can be combined with background socioeconomic data, census information and transport facilities to identify concentrations of need and help understand and plan strategies to address complex or multiple problems. The GIS tool is being rolled out nationally to all Jobcentre Plus district offices by December 2005 and Local Authorities will be given access to aggregate information derived from these tools.

- 3.7 Pooling information about **effective and innovative services** is also key to planning improvements locally. Practical and evaluation information on **specialist housing support to meet the needs of ethnic minority groups** is available on 'BME Spark'.³ This is a web based Supporting People initiative that brings together people with an interest in meeting the needs of people from black and ethnic minority communities.* The site contains research evidence and information and sources of support regarding a number of areas such as homelessness, mental health, domestic violence, and drug and alcohol addiction.

Improving access to services

The 'GIRLS Sexual Health Textback Service' is a confidential service offering relationship and **sexual health advice** to 13 to 25 year old women in Durham and Chester-le-Street.⁴ The service **encourages young women to send in questions by text message** and sexual health outreach workers then text back a response. Text messaging provides anonymity for service users which helps to counter any stigma or embarrassment associated with sexual health issues. ICT can **help tackle stigma** in many ways. In the north east, a study found that the introduction of **smart cards** as a means to pay for school meals greatly increased the uptake of free school meals as all pupils used the same payment method – and those on free school meals did not stand out.⁵

- 3.8 **Being aware of available services and benefits** is a key issue for excluded groups. Both national and local government provide Internet portals that enable citizens to identify what services are available. The most prominent of these is Government's flagship service 'Directgov', which regularly receives 150,000 unique users each week.⁶ The portal enables individuals to seek information and advice on a broad range of issues including finding a job, claiming benefits, and coping with bereavement. User feedback is positive, with 80 per cent stating that Directgov gives convenient access to public services and information.⁷
- 3.9 However, excluded groups require more targeted information that is also relevant to their locality. The 'Local Directgov programme' has been developed to help increase take up of online local authority services through Directgov.⁸
- 3.10 **Making information about key services more accessible** is the principle aim of 'StartHere', an electronic information service that runs on a range of digital media (such as digital TV and kiosks).⁹ StartHere signposts people, simply and effectively, to the specialist organisations and services voluntary and statutory, national and local that can help them most. It is an accessible, easy to use starting point for anyone looking for information on a range of health, housing, education, employment and social issues.
- 3.11 Some service providers utilise ICT to provide detailed, essential, and **immediate information targeted at specific problems**. The following paragraphs set out examples that demonstrate the broad variety of complex problems that can be addressed through ICT.

* The ODPM Supporting People programme offers vulnerable people the opportunity to improve their quality of life by providing a stable environment which enables greater independence.

- 3.12 **A single point of access to information about housing related services for vulnerable people** is provided by the ‘Supporting People Directory of Services’ which went live in August 2005.¹⁰ The directory helps vulnerable people, their advocates, and professional Supporting People advisers to see what services are available and promotes choice for the service user.
- 3.13 **Finding a hostel for homeless people:** Launched in October 2005, ‘Homeless UK’ provides a website containing information about over 8,000 services across the UK, including hostels, advice and support services.¹¹ This will complement other, locally customised, websites for London, Edinburgh, Bradford and Dublin that provide up to the minute information to local homeless referral agencies about vacancies in hostels and housing projects.
- 3.14 **Finding support or refuge for a woman experiencing domestic violence** is facilitated by ‘UKRefugesonline’, an online, secure database of domestic violence services across the whole of the UK which was launched in December 2002. UKRefugesonline has been developed through a UK wide partnership of domestic violence agencies – Northern Ireland Women’s Aid, Refuge, Scottish Women’s Aid, Welsh Women’s Aid and Women’s Aid Federation of England. ODPM contributed £1 million over three years, matched by £1 million from Comic Relief to establish and operate UKRefugesonline and a new national 24 hour freephone domestic violence helpline (run in partnership by Refuge and Women’s Aid). UKRefugesonline aims to improve the services received by women and children fleeing domestic violence in need of refuge accommodation and other support services.
- 3.15 One of the great advantages of ICT is that it provides opportunities for people **to work or conduct business remotely**. ICT supports practitioners who visit people in their own homes or in the community by enabling them to maintain links with back office systems. Similarly, service users can use ICT to access services remotely at their convenience – overcoming transport difficulties, physical mobility constraints, and child care issues.

The ‘Nomad National Project’ provides a range of tools which allow front line practitioners to access information, and communicate on the move, and work remotely.¹³ Mobile technology has been introduced through Nomad to equip ambulance staff in Cambridgeshire with handheld ‘Blackberry’ devices which **can access the council’s social services data remotely to provide background information about individuals when attending a call.*** This can help ambulance staff consider appropriate responses to non-emergency incidents which can help avoid admittance to hospital. Efficiencies can also be realised by processing information instantly to avoiding duplication of effort caused by inputting the same information into different systems.

- 3.16 Within the DWP, the Pensions Service and Jobcentre Plus both now use the **telephone as the main channel for clients to make new claims**. IT systems support call centre operatives and prompt advisers to ask relevant questions, request evidence, and make appointments. In addition, a small number of benefits, including Child Benefit and Carers Allowance can now be claimed online.^{14,15}

* Blackberry: a handheld mobile device that combines the functionality of a conventional mobile phone with the ability to securely send and receive e-mails and access the Internet.

- 3.17 The ability to keep in touch electronically can be of particular benefit for excluded groups. **A faster response on sexual health tests and appointments** is an outcome of a text messaging initiative at Leeds General Infirmary.¹⁶ Patients receive appointment reminders and negative test results by text message in a move which is helping reduce waiting times for sexual health treatment. Since March 2005 around 450 patients per month receive their test results by text, which has **helped reduce waiting times** for results from anything up to eight weeks to as little as ten days. The new system also **frees up an estimated six hours of nursing time per week**. With text messages, clients do not have to worry about phone calls or letters that may be wrongly received by their parents or friends in shared accommodation. From September 2005, text messages are also used to encourage patients that miss their appointment to make contact to arrange a new appointment.
- 3.18 Text messaging is particularly popular among younger people and is used in the 'Text Someone' initiative to help pupils **report bullying, crime or anti-social behaviour** to their school.¹⁷

More effective, integrated, personalised, and customer focused services

- 3.19 *Transformational Government* sets out the roadmap to make better use of personal information, such as name, address, and basic personal details, which is used across multiple agencies.¹⁸ Tackling exclusion requires more complex information sharing. This involves identifying necessary **triggers** and **interventions**. What is often missing in dealing with people who are in touch with many agencies in both the public and the private sector is a shared **awareness among these agencies of what the other is doing**. And if we aim to deliver preventative and proactive services to head off crises (like re-offending, or homelessness), then we need to be able to react to the **danger signs** or key triggers which indicate that the risk of crisis is high and co-ordinate intervention. The examples set out below highlight how this is being achieved.
- 3.20 **Sharing information when people move to another area** is another key aspect of improving proactive services, which will be explored in the forthcoming SEU report *Moving On: Reconnecting Frequent Movers*. The 'NOTIFY' initiative deals with statutory homeless families and individuals as they move into, between and out of temporary accommodation.¹⁹ It passes relevant information about the household to housing, education, social care, and health services in the boroughs that the household is moving into or out of via a secure website. This system enables agencies to more effectively plan and target their services, helps safeguard against silo working practices and stops vulnerable people 'slipping through the net' as they move between boroughs.
- 3.21 The DWP Link-Age model has explored how to develop networks of services for older people and join up services with the Pension Service and other partners. Two initiatives highlighted in Link-Age are Joint Teams and Alternative Offices **which are made possible by ICT enabled services**.^{20,21,22} Joint Teams link up local authorities and Pension Service staff to work as a single team, undertaking single visits, taking claims across the range of benefits and undertaking financial assessments for other services. Alternative Offices are facilities which enable accredited partner organisations and intermediaries (such as local authorities or third sector organisations) to take claims for Pension Credit and other benefits, and to verify information.

Building personal capacity

Improving educational underachievement is the focus of the ‘**Knowsley Plus One Challenge**’, which supports personalised learning, focusing on attendance, self organisation, learning skills and support.²³ The initiative offers additional revision classes and subject specific revision templates and provides pupils with a full personal revision portfolio, an interactive website, and uses text messages and e-mail to **send revision tips and provide wake up calls** to pupils who are persistently late for school. Local **GCSE results have improved year on year** compared to the national average.

- 3.22 ICT can play a role in helping to build excluded individual’s personal capacity for example, building their self confidence and self esteem. ICT based initiatives that aim to build personal capacity tend to be Internet based services, with the exception of telecare systems. As discussed in **Chapter 1**, ICT can help to address some of the key drivers of social exclusion:
- **Early years disadvantage and educational underachievement**
- 3.23 **Providing support for parents:** In the Slovak Republic the web portal ‘**Babetko**’ has been developed by young parents to provide **information and advice about childcare** for parents and guardians (including prospective parents).²⁴ Babetko also contains discussion groups, with input provided by health and child care professionals, and is accessible through the Internet, e-mail and WAP* enabled mobile phones. The portal has achieved a high degree of success, attracting over 55,000 visits a month.
- 3.24 **Re-engaging young people with education** is a key aim of ‘**Notschool.net**’, an online project looking at ways of re-engaging young people of school age back into learning.²⁵ Those involved have been out of the traditional educational system for a variety of personal and logistical reasons ranging from pregnancy to general disaffection. During its first phase Notschool.net established a virtual community of 100 young people who were given the opportunity to develop their self-esteem and be reintroduced to learning. This was achieved through the support of mentors and buddies facilitated by ICT. An early evaluation of the project highlighted **success in sensitively engaging and motivating young people** in an environment with no threat of failure, and demonstrated its ability to provide a cost effective way to engage and educate such young people.²⁶
- 3.25 **Improving educational outcomes for sick children:** ICT is being used by a number of local authorities to help children with serious medical conditions, who are unable to attend school for long periods of time or who have their education regularly disrupted. Pupils are given access to online learning content, live and recorded virtual lessons, and opportunities to interact with their peers. Pupils are able to use this method of support when they feel well enough to do so, and are motivated to learn within a virtual classroom and review lessons they may have missed. Typically this is provided in addition to home tutor visits so pupils are supported but also able to study independently. This form of support is also being explored with excluded pupils.

* WAP (Wireless Application Protocol): A secure specification that allows users to access information instantly via handheld wireless devices such as mobile phones and pagers.

- 3.26 Technology is being used to **support the individual needs of pupils with communication impairments**. The ‘**Communication Aids Project**’ (CAP) aims to help children with significant communication difficulties by working in partnership with schools and Local Education Authorities to identify and provide equipment to support such pupils.²⁷ Case study evidence illustrates the positive impact that technology provided through CAP has had on the social and educational outcomes of children with communication impairments.
- 3.27 Learners of all ages with **severe and complex physical and communication needs** are provided with a **tailored personalised service** by the independent charities, the **ACE Centres**. The social, learning and family contexts are all considered and reviewed by health, education and other specialists. Working together with the individual and their carers, they assess how and where ICT can help address specific needs and improve overall quality of life. Realising the individual’s potential is the key driver, and the solutions are kept under constant review as personal circumstances and medical condition change. ICT is also used to provide information, support and advice using telephone, fax, e-mail and online services.²⁸
- 3.28 **To help combat truancy** software has been installed in many schools throughout the UK. Software links in with attendance registers and highlights any pupils who are absent without a valid reason. It then automatically triggers a phone call or a text message telling parents that their child is not in school and requesting that the parent phone the school. Such systems do not address the causes of absenteeism but offer part of the solution in helping schools to more easily track and monitor absent pupils.
- 3.29 **Engaging disadvantaged young people in learning ICT skills** happens through projects run by Fairbridge, the charity which supports disadvantaged 13 to 25 year olds in urban areas.²⁹ By using computers regularly, participants who previously saw ICT skills as “pointless” begin to realise the potential that computers hold for them. For example, through short, fun cookery courses, which help to develop independent living skills, basic literacy and numeracy and ICT skills are included – by using the Internet to research new recipes, typing up menus and working out meal budgets.
- **Worklessness**
- 3.30 ICT is being used to **improve the employment prospects for socially excluded groups** by helping them to develop social networks. The majority of jobs are found by networking, that is people using the help and knowledge of friends and ‘friends of friends’ to find work. ‘**MegaNexus**’ is a web based social networking tool which operates in a number of areas in London and aims to connect socially excluded people, provide access to people, organisations, opportunities and information to find employment, and connect local support agencies to enable job brokerage.³⁰ So far, the service has over 2,500 users, of which 1,700 are jobseekers. Over 150 people have found work, over 300 have been connected to training opportunities and around 300 people made use of local services through the network.
- 3.31 **Improving unemployed people’s access to ICT and quality information** is a principle aim of the Peabody Trust’s ‘**Digivan**’.³¹ The Digivan is a custom built mobile IT centre that visits various sites across London and offers computer-based training to people in isolated urban areas free of charge, bringing learning, vocational and job search opportunities to neighbourhoods where it is needed the most.

3.32 **Improving job search for people with disabilities:** The ‘Merc@dis’ project based in Spain has helped improve employment outcomes for disabled people.³² It has achieved this by creating a ‘marketplace’ web portal which brings together disabled people seeking work and employers with job vacancies suitable for people with disabilities. The website hosts forums that enable disabled people to communicate with each other about employment and other issues, and provides information about job searching, courses, and writing CVs. The project has also played an important role in raising employers’ awareness of the benefits of employing disabled workers.

- **Low income**

3.33 **Financial savings** can be achieved using ICT. According to research by UK online centres, over a third of the UK population is needlessly paying up to £283 per year extra for everyday goods and services simply because they are not using the Internet.³³ A challenge undertaken in Northumberland to provide a family of four with healthy food, including fresh fruit and vegetables, on a budget of £35 a week found that even with delivery charges it was cheaper to shop online through a major supermarket than use local shops.³⁴ However, this raises the issue that many people on lower incomes may not have access to debit or credit cards to make online purchases.

Safe storage of documents and certificates is essential for homeless and other highly mobile people, who may need them to claim benefits, get appropriate social or medical support and use as evidence of qualifications for a job application. Crisis (the homelessness charity) are developing a ‘Virtual Life Portfolio’ – which will provide homeless people with a means of owning, storing and managing key personal data as well as accessing vital information on services and support.³⁵ The Virtual Life Portfolio could also support online learning and computer skills development. A ‘vault’ for storing documents electronically has been produced by ‘The Who Cares? Trust’ as one feature in ‘CareZone’ (now CZ World), a secure web based ICT network for children and young people in care.³⁶

- **Homelessness**

3.34 **Supporting resettlement into tenanted accommodation** is addressed by ‘It’s Your Move’, the website of Broadway’s resettlement support project.³⁷ It provides access to resources and training to improve chances of success when people move into a tenancy of their own. Part of this package involves an interactive computer game in cartoon format to help guide homeless people through preparations needed to move into their own accommodation. Similarly outreach ICT training, with Internet and e-mail access, is provided by Glasgow Homelessness Network’s ‘Homeless Information Pages’. The associated website provides one-stop information and advice on a range of housing, health and money issues, and offers people affected by homelessness the chance to communicate via a chat room and message board.³⁸

- **Health and health inequalities**

3.35 ‘Telecare’ systems **support independent living, can help avoid hospital admissions, and facilitate early discharge from hospital** by providing a safe and secure home environment. Fall detectors can alert carers and provide peace of mind to users and devices such as flood sensors can detect overflowing taps. Other systems

can be used to provide reminders to take medicine or attend a doctor's appointment. The Department of Health's Preventative Technologies Grant provides £80 million over two years from April 2006 for local authorities to invest in telecare to enable 160,000 older people to stay in their homes and reduce the number of avoidable admissions to residential care and hospital.³⁹

3.36 **Addressing childhood obesity** by using ICT to promote healthy eating among school pupils is taking place in Glasgow. The city council offers incentives for healthy eating to around 30,000 children in 29 secondary schools via the 'Fuel Zone Points Reward scheme'.⁴⁰ The pupils, who sign up to the scheme on a voluntary basis, are given **smartcards** with magnetic stripes that are used to record points gained for eating sensibly. As the points accumulate, they can be redeemed for various rewards including cinema tickets and computer game consoles.

- **Crime (and being a victim of crime)**

3.37 **Building safer neighbourhoods:** 'AlertBox' is an electronic form of neighbourhood watch which enables people to warn their neighbours of any trouble or threat, or request their help in an emergency, by simply pressing a button. Current projects in London, the Midlands, Wales, north east England and Scotland have demonstrated improved community safety and reduced fear of crime, in both residential and commercial settings.⁴¹

3.38 **Protecting vulnerable people against crime:** Help the Aged runs a bogus caller scheme as part of their 'SeniorLink' community alarm service.⁴² Older people can summon assistance on their door step, by pressing a 'door alert button'. This connects them direct to Help the Aged's response centre, who can check the potential bogus callers credentials centrally. The system is linked to communication with the police in case of emergency, but acts as a deterrent in its own right.

3.39 ICT is also offering new ways of **reporting non-emergency crime**. The Police now offer a service via the Internet to report theft, criminal damage, theft from a motor vehicle and hate crimes/incidents. The service sends information to a police investigator, and the notification is followed up within two working days.⁴³ People can also anonymously report crime through a free phone number to 'Crimestoppers'.⁴⁴ **Reporting anti-social behaviour** is encouraged through 'It's your call', a dedicated phone line for the public to report anti-social behaviour, launched by the Home Office in January 2005.⁴⁵

3.40 **A cost effective way of helping to reduce re-offending among young male prisoners** is offered by the 'Lifting the Weight CD Rom'. This multimedia game is based on interactive role-play that challenges offenders to explore how their behaviour can lead to them re-offending once they are back in the community.⁴⁶

Building social networks and civic participation

Reducing personal isolation, motivating individuals and encouraging community participation are all key outputs from 'Leicestershire CareOnLine'.⁴⁷ This initiative provides a website designed for the needs of disabled people, older people and carers, and offers assistance in gaining access to computers, provides ICT training in people's own homes and supports them as they learn. Participants who used to be isolated now have regular contact with the outside world and each other (from home) and a community network has developed. Seventy six per cent of users report that CareOnLine has had a positive impact on their daily lives.

- 3.41 'NetMums' is a network of locally focused websites aimed at parents to help them enjoy and cope with the demands of parenthood. The websites provide information about places to go, local activities, education, childcare, community and employment issues. Support and guidance is also provided on topics such as postnatal depression. The sites help to bring local mothers together to **improve their social networks and combat isolation**.⁴⁸
- 3.42 The 'Everybody Online' initiative has a programme of activities which help people to overcome any barriers they have with computers and the Internet.⁴⁹ Frank (72) from Cheshire got involved in a local project and **developed an interest in ICT through his interest in budgerigars**. He joined an Internet budgerigar group and now regularly corresponds with like minded people from Australia, Canada and Pakistan. ICT has had a big impact on Frank: "It has changed my life really. I now use the Internet to find cheap goods, buy things online, research my hobbies and **communicate with all sorts of people worldwide**."
- 3.43 **Helping people to better engage with the Government** is an outcome of 'WriteToThem.com', a website run by the charitable organisation MySociety.⁵⁰ The site enables users to contact any of their elected representatives including Members of Parliament and local councillors.

Conclusions

- 3.44 This chapter has set out a range of existing projects that make excellent use of ICT to successfully address and reduce social exclusion problems at a local level. Based on these examples of good practice we suggest that the following list of activities should be replicated by local authorities to better meet the needs of socially excluded groups – and to realise the efficiencies of ICT to reinvest resources into further tackling social exclusion.

Local Authority ten point action plan

Action 1: We recommend that local authorities consider the following list of priority ICT based activities to improve service delivery and outcomes for socially excluded groups:

- 1 Make more effective use of data to tackle social exclusion, including Neighbourhood Statistics and locally available data for service delivery, strategy planning and review and evaluation of interventions. See Chapter 5 for a more detailed discussion of ICT enabled information use/exchange for strategy planning (e.g. GMAC (p52)).**
- 2 In setting out their services, provide a range of access channels for excluded groups to contact the authority and other local service providers, providing information and advice on local services. These channels include face to face, the Internet, e-mail, telephone and text message (e.g. Start Here (p27)).**
- 3 In doing business with excluded groups, offer a range of access channels including e-mail, telephone and text message – for example, to notify registered citizens of employment/training opportunities, appointment reminders, local information/events, school truancy (e.g. GIRLS Sexual Health textback (p27)).**
- 4 Ensure that full use is made of ICT and customer relationship management systems to explore and expand single points of contact for health and social care, housing, money and benefits issues – so excluded individuals can easily access the services they need and not have to identify and contact a range of different departments (e.g. Care Direct Somerset (p49) or CRM National Project (p52)).**
- 5 Actively identify the need and opportunities to securely share personal information about vulnerable people across trusted partner agencies. This could focus on identifying early signs of crises and triggers for co-ordinated responses (e.g. RYOGENS (p54)). Priority groups could include: children and young people, disadvantaged adults (including those with health and housing problems or at risk of offending), and vulnerable older people. This work involves using and developing information sharing protocols.**
- 6 Allow citizen information to be securely shared with other local authorities when people move – to ensure people’s ‘case histories’ are maintained to inform service need/delivery in their new area (e.g. Notify (p29)).**
- 7 Actively promote local voluntary and community services and sources of information (e.g. NetMums website (p34) or the Crisis virtual life portfolio (p32)) to complement statutory services and extend the reach of non-statutory ICT based initiatives which tackle social exclusion themes. Also, to work closer with the third sector to avoid duplication of ICT initiatives.**

- 8 Local authorities and Local Strategic Partnerships should build on the Department of Health target for telecare to be available in all homes that need it by December 2010 by exploring the potential to bundle additional ICT facilities with these telecare packages – for example to provide people with home access to the Internet and e-mail. (see p32 Chapter 3 and p45 Chapter 4)**
- 9 Use ICT to facilitate remote working to allow staff to work more in the community and help hard to reach groups in their own homes (e.g. Project Nomad (p28)).**
- 10 Encourage excluded individuals to make better use of local ICT facilities (e.g. UK online centres or ICT available in local libraries/community centres) to keep in touch with friends and family and foster communities of interest through ICT to help combat social isolation.**

3.45 For these opportunities to be realised, however, a number of barriers will need to be addressed, which will be explored in **Chapters 4** and **5**.

CHAPTER 4

Barriers and actions to improve access

Summary

This chapter draws on the *Inclusion Through Innovation* consultation and other evidence to consider how increased use could be made of ICT in addressing social exclusion by exploring both the barriers to extending access to ICT and the actions needed to address these barriers. The barriers are:

- **Connectivity:** Lack of access to a digital platform, such as a PC, digital TV or telephone, which allows interaction with e-services, e-mail and the Internet;
- **Capability:** The low level of capacity (such as poor basic skills, physical impairments, low confidence, and lack of motivation) that some excluded groups have to engage with ICT; and
- **Content:** Having engaged with ICT there is a shortage of relevant or tailored content for excluded groups without which the Internet remains a domain for professionals.

Actions are set out to overcome these barriers, which include the need to better identify the scale of the problem, promoting community development approaches to ICT engagement and improving access in the community.

Introduction

- 4.1 This report has set out in **Chapters 1** and **3** the ways in which ICT can significantly improve outcomes and quality of life for socially excluded people. Some of the benefits of digital inclusion are summarised in **Table 1**. This chapter explores the barriers to **extending access to ICT and the actions needed to address these barriers**.
- 4.2 The disparity in levels of access to ICT remains a significant concern in engaging and delivering services to socially excluded people. As we set out in **Chapter 2**, many of the benefits of ICT depend on the engagement of users. Respondents to our focus groups set out a range of barriers, from the user perspective, to achieving this. This chapter builds on this evidence and sets out the key barriers to using ICT to improve service delivery that were identified by service providers in response to our public consultation.

4.3 This chapter focuses predominantly on the Internet as the most significant digital provider of information and as a means of access to information for socially excluded groups. But digital inclusion also encompasses access to a wider range of technologies such as telecare, mobile telephones and digital TV. These ICTs can provide a platform for access to the Internet, more direct access to services (e.g. call centres), and other improved social outcomes (e.g. greater independence through telecare). Results from our consultation highlight the range of ICTs that are beneficial to excluded groups.

Table 1: Evidence of the benefits of digital inclusion

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Improved educational attainment: access at home to a computer at age 15 can increase the number of GCSEs achieved on average by over 1.2.*
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increased public service access: low income groups who have internet access make more use of public services than those who do not.¹
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Improved employment prospects: Over 30 per cent of internet users in the UK have searched for jobs online.² Evaluation of UK Online centres found that a third of users said that attending the centre had helped them improve their skills for work significantly.³
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Financial benefits: Over four years, taking into account the expenditure involved in home Internet access (e.g. access charges and equipment purchase) the Internet can save socially excluded people on average £268 per year.⁴
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Social benefits: ICTs can repair some of the social 'despair', which can blight old age. Age Concern research revealed that of people aged 55 years and over who are computer users, 66 per cent feel it has a positive impact on their lives.⁵
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A lifeline: Online forums can provide a 'lifeline' to people suffering from debilitating conditions, depression, and insomnia.†
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reaching the hard to reach: The ability for some groups including homeless people, and young runaways, to send e-mails via personal Internet accounts, provides a way of re-establishing contact, rebuilding, and maintaining relationships with friends and family.‡

* J. Schmitt and J. Wadsworth, *Is there an impact of household computer ownership on children's educational attainment in Britain?* (2004) The study, which used data from the British Household Panel Survey on British youths (1991-2001) to investigate the potential link between PC ownership and children's educational attainment, found a significant positive correlation between home computer ownership and both the number of GCSEs obtained and the probability of passing five or more GCSEs. They found that having access at home to a PC at age 15 increased the number of GCSEs achieved on average by over 1.2. Home computer ownership was also associated with a significant increase in the probability of passing at least one A level and of attaining three or more A level passes. See: <http://cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/download/dp0625.pdf>

† For example a symptom, of Parkinson's disease is insomnia – the Parkinson's disease online forum attracts a high proportion of visitors at night-time, when other forms of support may not be as readily available.

‡ "The interesting thing about the Internet is... It's actually very equalising for the people we work with. They don't need to have a home, can access it at any time, and it's anonymous. It has definitely enhanced the skills and knowledge base of homeless people" Claire Russell from the Big Issue Foundation, *The Guardian*, 16 July 2001 'Using the Internet to help the homeless'.

The service provider perspective

4.4 The majority of the 261 responses to our consultation were from service providers, of which 35 per cent were from the third sector, 57 per cent from the public sector, and six per cent from the private sector.⁶ Respondents identified several key uses for ICT in tackling social exclusion (see **Table 2**). These included the use of mobile technologies to help disadvantaged people who move frequently, online training facilities for those with low basic skills, multi-lingual packages to help certain ethnic minority groups, online forums and chat rooms to combat isolation and stimulate civic engagement, and the use of CCTV to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour.

Table 2: Key uses for ICT to address social exclusion issues⁷

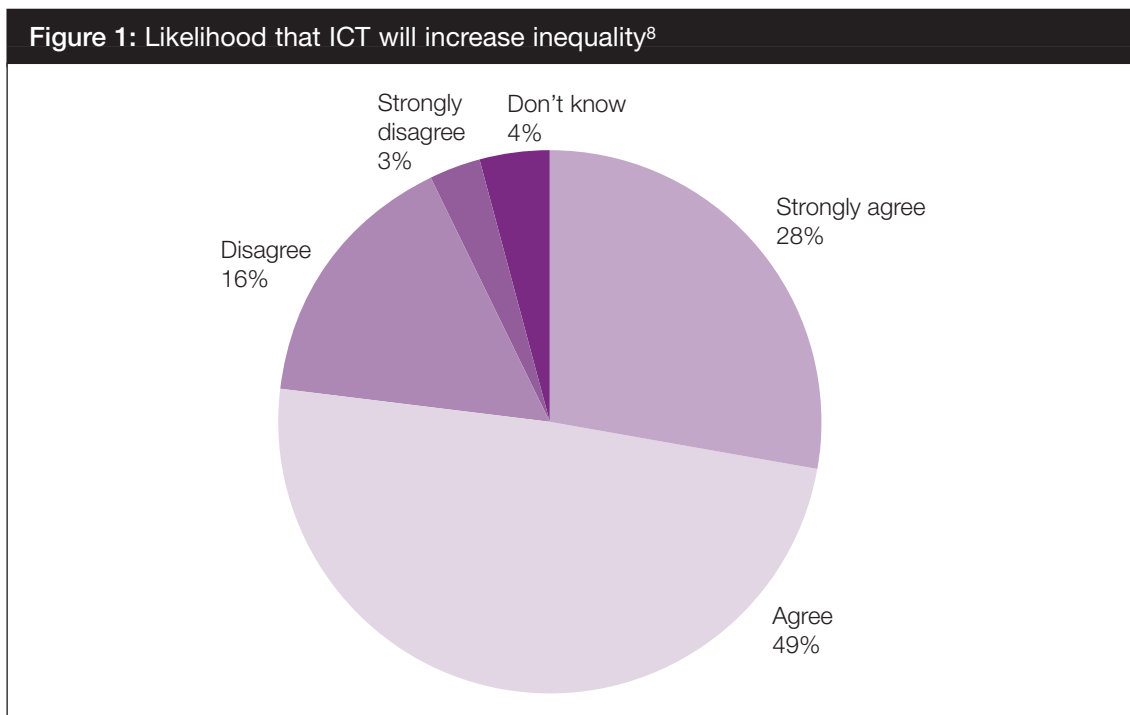
Group/issue	ICT based solution/application	Percentage respondents
Frequent movers	Mobile technologies	28
	Free access to ICT in libraries and community centres	20
Poor basic skills and educational underachievement	Develop online training and learning/teach basic skills online	35
Ethnic minority groups	Develop multi-lingual packages/language programmes	27
	Adapt programmes to different cultures/learning/employment	20
Worklessness	Develop online training/distance learning	23
	Remote working/work on broadband from home	20
Civic engagement	Online forums/chat rooms/discussion forums	23
	Mobile phones to vote/online voting	19
Crime	Use of CCTV reduces crime/fear of crime	51

Source: MORI analysis of SEU consultation (see Annex C)

4.5 Respondents were also asked to comment on how ICT could support front line staff in delivering services. This prompted the following responses: “improved access to information/needs matching” (45 per cent of respondents), “increased mobility/outreach” (25 per cent), and “improved communications” (13 per cent).

Barriers identified by service providers

4.6 Consultation respondents expressed concern that developments in ICT would lead to increased social inequalities. Half of respondents (49 per cent) agreed that inequality would increase with greater use of ICT, and just over a quarter (28 per cent) strongly agreed. Less than a fifth (19 per cent) of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed (see **Figure 1**).



Source: MORI analysis of SEU consultation (see Annex C)

4.7 As **Table 3** shows, respondents cited a range of reasons for why they thought that ICT would increase inequality. The most common reasons related to cost (38 per cent), lack of basic skills (26 per cent), and access barriers (25 per cent).

Table 3: Reasons why ICT will increase inequality⁹

Why inequality will increase	Percentage respondents
Lack of money	38
Lack of training/competence/basic skills	26
Lack of access to ICTs	25
Manufacturers lack of insight	11

Source: MORI analysis of SEU consultation (see Annex C)

4.8 The views expressed by respondents reflect the concerns about price, lack of basic skills, and availability of ICT that were raised in our focus groups. Three distinct but interrelated areas for action emerge from this evidence when considering the barriers to bridging the digital divide. These barriers have been widely cited in external research and are commonly referred to as:

- **Connectivity:** Lack of access to a digital platform, such as a PC or telephone, which allows interaction with e-services, e-mail and the Internet;
- **Capability:** The low level of capacity that some excluded groups have to engage with ICT; and
- **Content:** That having engaged with ICT there is a shortage of relevant or tailored content for excluded groups, without which the Internet remains a domain for professionals and the “digerati”.*

Actions on access and availability

Processing benefit applications in people’s homes is done by Halton Borough Council’s ‘Benefits Express’.¹⁰ The mobile Benefits Express bus is connected via a 3G (Third Generation) mobile phone to the Council’s computer systems so staff using laptop PCs can process benefit claims in people’s homes, and provide access to other services.[†] Processing time for benefits claims has been reduced from eight weeks to less than a fortnight.

- 4.9 **Chapter 2** outlined some of the current work within individual government departments, and in the context of the *Digital Strategy*, to address the broad barriers to ICT access. However, it is apparent that further action would be desirable. The recently announced Digital Challenge will provide a focus on the overall provision of e-services for all, but will have a clear focus on socially excluded people.[‡] It is imperative that the opportunity presented by the Digital Challenge to deliver the benefits of ICT to socially excluded groups is realised.

Action 2: The Digital Challenge, launched in autumn 2005, will ensure the development of a world class example of digital inclusion benefiting one region, city or similar sized area to drive forward the use of technologies and extend the benefits to all citizens including the most disadvantaged.

* The digerati “may not be the ones who build the technology and write the software programmes, but they have the knowledge, skills and connections to make the technology work to their advantage.” (Forum for the Future, Digital Europe Project, see: <http://www.digital-eu.org/>)

† 3G mobile phone systems provide high-speed data transmission and supporting multimedia applications such as full motion video, video conferencing and Internet access.

‡ The Digital Challenge is a key action of the Governments *Digital Strategy*. Together with the private sector, the Government will sponsor a region, city or similar sized area to drive forward the use of ICTs to tackle the digital divide through universal access, advance public service delivery, address social exclusion and provide a test-bed for best practice in e-government.

Metrics – understanding local needs

- 4.10 A lack of access to ICT, both at home and within the community, has been identified as a key barrier to digital inclusion. Looking nationally at patterns of digital exclusion, we need to have a clearer picture of the extent and nature of this problem. Detailed information is required at the local level to allow local service delivery agents to better identify and respond to local need and target digital inclusion initiatives more effectively and efficiently using appropriate channels. However, information on digital inclusion at the local level is often patchy or not detailed enough to fully assess local need or target an accurate response. National surveys which collect detailed information on digital inclusion tend not to have sufficient coverage or detail to support local analysis of excluded groups. **Much useful local level information is, however, collected and aggregated by private sector Internet Service Providers and other organisations. The public sector should seek to work with these groups to better understand local need.** The SEU will work with the Digital Challenge to pilot this approach.
- 4.11 The monitoring of digital inclusion is also relevant to the Government's overall strategy for tackling poverty and social exclusion. A better understanding of this relationship could help to drive the use of ICT in social exclusion strategies. Metrics are therefore required to raise awareness of digital inclusion and to contribute to the better understanding of the issues involved. A commitment to review the digital divide in 2008 has been set out in the *Digital Strategy*. Metrics also help to act as a driver for change. For example, the requirement of local authorities to measure interactions enabled for electronic delivery as part of a suite of Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI 157) has been a critical driver to meet the Government's target for all government services to be accessible electronically by December 2005.¹¹
- 4.12 The Governments annual review of poverty and social exclusion, *Opportunity for all*, has this year acknowledged digital inclusion for the first time which is an important step in highlighting the link between digital inclusion and social inclusion.¹² Building on this, we recommend:

Action 3: Promoting the use of metrics to help inform the commitment to review the digital divide in 2008. Government will also engage in further discussion to examine the possibility of including a digital indicator in the 2006 *Opportunity for all* report.

- 4.13 In addition, at a local government level, to drive digital inclusion strategies:

Action 4: ODPM will monitor how local e-government strategies are meeting the needs of excluded groups through the IEG5 section 2 returns from local authorities. In addition IEG5 will promote the good practice initiatives identified as part of this report.*

* Implementing Electronic Government (IEG) statements are corporate plans which set out how local councils are approaching the task of improving service delivery through e-government. They help to monitor the progress of councils towards the achievement of 100 per cent e-enablement and priority outcome targets for 2005/06. See 'local e-gov' website: <http://www.localegov.gov.uk>

Community access to ICT

- 4.14 **Chapter 2** highlighted the success of the community access programme, UK online, in engaging a broad range of socially excluded groups with the Internet, in promoting interest in and access to learning, and in building people's skills and confidence. But it also pointed to research that revealed that UK online has had more limited success in engaging multiply excluded, hard to reach groups.¹³
- 4.15 Third sector centres, such as community centres, have had more success in attracting the target groups, and research suggests that to be truly effective, centres should either be locally 'owned' or deeply involved in the local community.¹⁴ However, third sector centres are more vulnerable to funding fluctuations and have less certainty about future funding than centres from other sectors.* While they are robust and do not close readily, such centres often need to find new streams of revenue in order to remain viable. There is a danger that without renewed investment, third sector centres will simply not support government services but rather favour funded learning or other funded activity. This could result in a missed opportunity to extend the benefits of ICT and e-government to the most disadvantaged people.
- 4.16 **In addition to funding concerns, there is a need to better promote community approaches to digital engagement that have demonstrated proven success.** For example, the 'EverybodyOnline' programme demonstrates the potential that community-based approaches have to engage socially excluded groups. EverybodyOnline is managed by the charity Citizens Online and sponsored by BT, Microsoft and the industry body Alliance for Digital Inclusion (ADI), and is an example of a successful community-based approach that employs community development methodologies to reach out to excluded groups. This approach has resulted in a significant increase in Internet usage within pilot areas in comparison to the national average and is now being used to shape 'Communities@One' a pan Wales digital inclusion programme.^{†,15} (See also example on p34).
- 4.17 To ensure future digital engagement for the most excluded people it is critical that we both explore the funding opportunities presented by e-government delivery to support community access and also support and build on the existing evidence of what works in reaching excluded groups. Ufi have responsibility for the development of UK online centres and are currently working to preserve the UK online network and improve their longer term sustainability. We therefore recommend:

Action 5: That central and local government use existing UK online centres in areas of disadvantage to design and test new online services to ensure fit-for-purpose for socially excluded groups.

* Nationally there are an estimated 1,350 'vulnerable' public Internet access centres. See Chapter 2 end note 10.

† For example, the EverybodyOnline project launched in Walker, Newcastle upon Tyne, resulted in a 13 per cent increase in Internet use, over 6 times that of the average national increase as measured by the Office for National Statistics (February 2003 – April 2004). For further information see: http://www.citizenonline.org.uk/everybody_online/project/walker

Action 6: Through the ‘UK online regional e-government project’, Ufi will investigate the benefits of UK online public Internet access points and their user support services, as a means of delivering e-government services to excluded groups. The project will present to Government and delivery agents a cost benefit analysis to inform future partnership and funding arrangements for UK online centres.

- 4.18 To further improve ICT access for specific excluded groups, a more focused approach is required. Policies are already in place to improve access for certain target groups. For example, a target has been set for every school to have a broadband connection by the end of 2006 to ensure fast access to learning opportunities for children and the Quality Protects programme has been used to install ICT into care and foster homes and to increase ICT access among care leavers.^{16,*}
- 4.19 Similar provision of broadband and supported access to ICT equipment needs to be made in centres that cater for socially excluded groups such as homeless people, disadvantaged older people, long-term hospitalised children, survivors of domestic violence, and community centres in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. This should be taken forward following careful review of current provision, needs, and barriers to installing ICT in such centres.

Action 7: We recommend that the specification and planning requirement for each homeless hostel, children’s home, sheltered housing scheme, NRU neighbourhood community centre and similar focal points for delivering services to disadvantaged groups should include the provision of a wireless broadband ‘hotspot’.[†] Local authorities should consider prioritising these facilities for support in ICT provision to enable jobsearch and educational ICT provision. Progress towards this should form part of the targets for delivering the *Digital Strategy*.

Home access to ICT

ICT has been used to enhance existing **distance learning for Traveller children** through the DfES funded ‘E-Learning And Mobility Project’ (E-LAMP) project.¹⁷ The project offers laptops with GPRS datacards and distance learning packs to participating families, and enables pupils to keep in close contact with their teachers, get work marked promptly and new challenges set.[‡] Traveller children can also keep in touch with their peers. Results indicate that participating students lost less ground academically, re-integrated back into their base schools more easily and resumed their studies with fewer difficulties than in previous years. Individual pupil’s were found to **gain in confidence and commitment to school work**, and had **much more positive attitudes to learning and their school communities**.

* Quality Protects is a Government programme launched in 1999 which aims to transform the lives of vulnerable children – particularly children in care, but also children with disabilities and children in need – by making significant improvements to their health and education prospects. For further information see: <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/qualityprotects/>

† Wireless Broadband Hotspot: A specific geographic location in which an access point provides public wireless broadband network services to mobile visitors. Hotspots are often located in heavily populated places such as airports, train stations, libraries, and hotels.

‡ GPRS (General Packet Radio Service): GPRS enhances the functionality of second generation mobile phones by enabling them to send and receive data more rapidly, allowing users to enjoy a more advanced Internet service.

- 4.20 Research indicates that current policy relating to public ICT access does not always truly address digital exclusion. The evaluation of UK online centres, for example, found that although users acquired ICT skills as a result of attending the centres, many felt that their new ICT skills were of limited use unless they secured home Internet access.¹⁸ For some people, community access to ICT is not conducive to certain activities; few people feel comfortable undertaking anything particularly private or sensitive such as claiming income support, or requesting a community care needs assessment from a personal computer in a library, or a kiosk in a shopping centre.¹⁹
- 4.21 There is already considerable government activity in promoting home ICT access. For example, DfES will be providing £25 million per annum in 2006/7 and 2007/8 to invest in home access to ICT for their neediest pupils.²⁰ It is hoped this initiative will reap considerable benefits for children. **To help address the cost concerns raised by the SEU focus group and consultation research, sustained government focus must be placed on delivering e-services and Internet access by exploiting digital platforms that have greater penetration in the ‘home’ environment among excluded groups such as mobile phones and digital TV.**
- 4.22 To further address this issue, when supplying ICT equipment designed to meet a specific social need, opportunities should be taken to install additional ICT facilities that would also be of assistance to socially excluded people. For example, whenever health or social services set up an in-home connection for an older person to deliver telecare or other community support, the opportunity should be taken to bundle in (at marginal cost) e-mail and other Internet services. This approach builds on current Department of Health guidance which encourages local authorities to work with partners including local strategic partnerships to develop locally appropriate telecare services.²¹

Action 8: We recommend that telecare systems should include broadband connections into people’s homes and should always look to bundle in other Internet capabilities, such as e-mail and local information feeds to help users stay connected to their local community.

Accessibility

Many private sector companies have improved the accessibility of their Internet sites which has helped to promote uptake of their services.

The Royal National Institute of the Blind (RNIB) worked closely with retail giant Tesco to make its website accessible to blind and partially-sighted people and have proved that by making your website more accessible there can be a commercial gain as well as a social one.²²

“The system has opened up a previously untapped market for Tesco. Since the collaboration, it has increased its revenue by £30m.”

(Julie Howell, Digital Policy Manager RNIB)

- 4.23 Website accessibility is also an issue, both for people with specific disabilities and for those with low language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills. Research by the Disability Rights Commission found that 81 per cent of websites fail to satisfy the most basic Web Accessibility Initiative category and have design characteristics that make it difficult for people with certain impairments to make use of the services provided.*²³
- 4.24 Other research has revealed that many websites are written in a way that is not easily accessible for users with poor literacy skills.²⁴ The online behaviour of lower-literacy users is radically different to that of higher-literacy users. Lower-literacy users tend not to understand text by glancing at it, and frequently skip over large amounts of text or information if they think it is too complicated. The 'search' function, available on many websites, creates problems for lower-literacy users because they have difficulty spelling query terms and understanding the peculiar snippets of text returned by search queries.²⁵
- 4.25 A study into the readability of diabetes websites by the University of Bath found that required reading ages were well above the estimated average reading age of the UK population. The average reading age required for the sites/pages tested was 14.2, significantly higher than the estimated average reading age of the UK population at nine years or Year 4/5 at UK school. The research found a required reading age of between 15 and 16 for BBC online health pages, and almost 17 for the NHS Direct Online website.²⁶
- 4.26 A commitment to addressing the barriers presented to disabled people in accessing services online is already part of the Government's *Digital Strategy*.

Action 9: The Department for Trade and Industry (DTI) are producing new guidance to improve the accessibility of UK Government websites, and the ODPM will consider how best to promote the implementation of this guidance to improve the accessibility of local authority websites.

- 4.27 Nationally the DfES have produced the MyGuide project, which involves the development of a package of support mechanisms to make the Internet accessible for all adults regardless of ability.²⁷ It will make available navigation, knowledge management, personalisation and diagnostic tools with accessibility, technical and user support appropriate for each user.

Action 10: We recommend that all government departments and local authorities engage with the MyGuide project to improve access to their services and take forward the key principles for providing accessible and usable e-services. We also recommend that Government departments and local authorities adopt the MyGuide provision to simplify the services they provide, including using MyGuide as a signpost to their services; ensuring that content standards are put in place using the findings from the MyGuide pilot.

* The World Wide Web Consortium's (W3C) Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) has published the 'Web Content Accessibility Guidelines', an internationally recognised set of general principles of accessible design that explain how to make Internet content accessible to people with disabilities. Every guideline is divided into a number of checkpoints, which are each assigned a priority level based on the checkpoint's impact on accessibility. A website can be rated at one of three Web Content Accessibility Guidelines conformance levels: A (Priority 1 items), Double-A (Priority 1 and 2 items) and Triple-A (Priority 1, 2 and 3 items). All UK government websites are currently expected to achieve as a minimum, and adhere to the Single 'A' (Priority 1 items) level.

Content

- 4.28 Critical to the promotion of the benefits of the Internet and e-government services is the availability of suitable content. As we have seen, a lack of suitable content will fail to engage the most excluded or fail to offer a suitable value proposition for them to engage. Some of the most successful websites and e-services drive interest by building on communities of interest in hobbies such as football, budgerigars or knitting. By building upon these 'content hooks', wider interest in the use of the Internet can be generated and a virtuous circle of participation begun.
- 4.29 The increasing access to broadband will also encourage users to access more interactive content.* For example, broadband will enable users to complete online forms, such as applications for benefits with greater ease than 'dial up' connections allow. Broadband remains a key piece of the jigsaw of digital engagement for excluded groups. Indeed recent research shows that there is evidence that when socially excluded households are connected to the Internet by broadband they use it more than other groups.²⁸

Action 11: We recommend that a priority will be given within the Digital Challenge to behavioural research focused on excluded individuals, and that results are considered as part of the digital divide review in 2008. The Digital Challenge competition will act as a test bed to develop a better understanding of the behaviours and attitudes of excluded groups, which is essential to engage them with e-government and ICT.

Conclusions

- 4.30 The drive for e-government and the wider proliferation of ICT in society both increases the importance of bridging the digital divide and makes it more attractive for users to become digitally engaged. The actions outlined in this chapter will encourage the participation of excluded groups in the digital world and will help to address some of the inequalities in access and outcomes highlighted by this report.

* BT's plan to speed up the delivery of broadband services in rural communities should bring near-universal coverage across the UK by Summer 2005 (Cabinet Office (2004) *Enabling a digitally United Kingdom*).

CHAPTER 5

Barriers and actions around information sharing

Summary

This chapter continues the discussion of barriers and actions – to help deliver joined up, customer focused services and service planning through more effective use and sharing of information.

Our research and other recent evidence highlight a number of real and perceived barriers to better information use and sharing. These include legal uncertainty, privacy and ethical concerns, technical barriers, organisational culture, an absence of leadership and poor understanding of the cost and likely returns from sharing data and working with partners.

Work to address these barriers is already underway and we build on existing activity with a number of agreed actions and recommendations for central and local government to realise the benefits of ICT enabled data sharing.

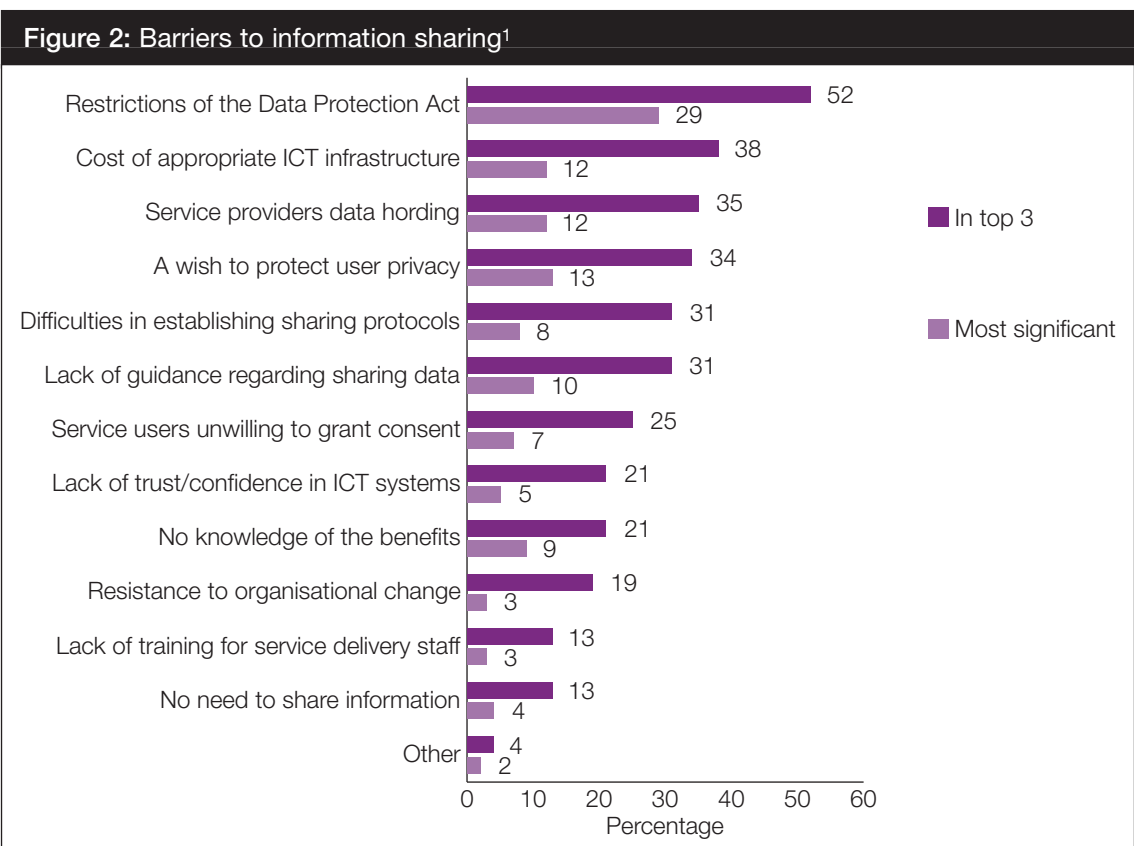
Introduction

- 5.1 The public sector generates, stores and uses a vast amount of administrative data and personal information about citizens from a wide range of sources and interactions. ICT, technological change and e-government offer great potential to better use and share this information to improve the way public services are planned and delivered.
- 5.2 Research commissioned by this project has identified major benefits of information sharing enabled by ICT, for improved service efficiency, enhanced knowledge and understanding of problems or needs, and better targeting and delivery of services (see **Annex F**).
- 5.3 Many examples of good practice exist. **Chapter 3** highlights a number of innovative ICT projects that are currently being used to manage anonymised data for ‘exclusion and strategic planning’ (p26) and personal information to ‘integrate and personalise services’ (p29). Evidence gathered as part of this report and other recent research has, however, found significant barriers to information use and exchange among service providers.

A single gateway for access and information about services for older people regarding care and support is provided by ‘Care Direct Somerset’ (CDS). This covers Social care, health, housing and benefits. A phone number can be used to access the CDS call centre 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Client information is collected once and can be shared, and referrals made, with a range of partner agencies and service providers. The service is popular among older people, relatives and carers now handling over 60,000 calls per year and helps distribute an additional £2 million annually in welfare benefits to older people and carers in Somerset.

Barriers to information sharing

5.4 Results from our consultation highlight a range of issues that practitioners consider to be major barriers to information sharing (see **Figure 2**). The legality of sharing information, particularly perceptions regarding the Data Protection Act was a key concern, along with a perceived lack of guidance from government. The cost of appropriate ICT to manage and share data was thought to be prohibitive by many respondents. Protecting client privacy and obtaining consent to share personal information were also considered barriers. Some practitioners had no clear knowledge of the benefits of information sharing and resistance by partner agencies to share information and difficulties in establishing data sharing protocols were also cited.

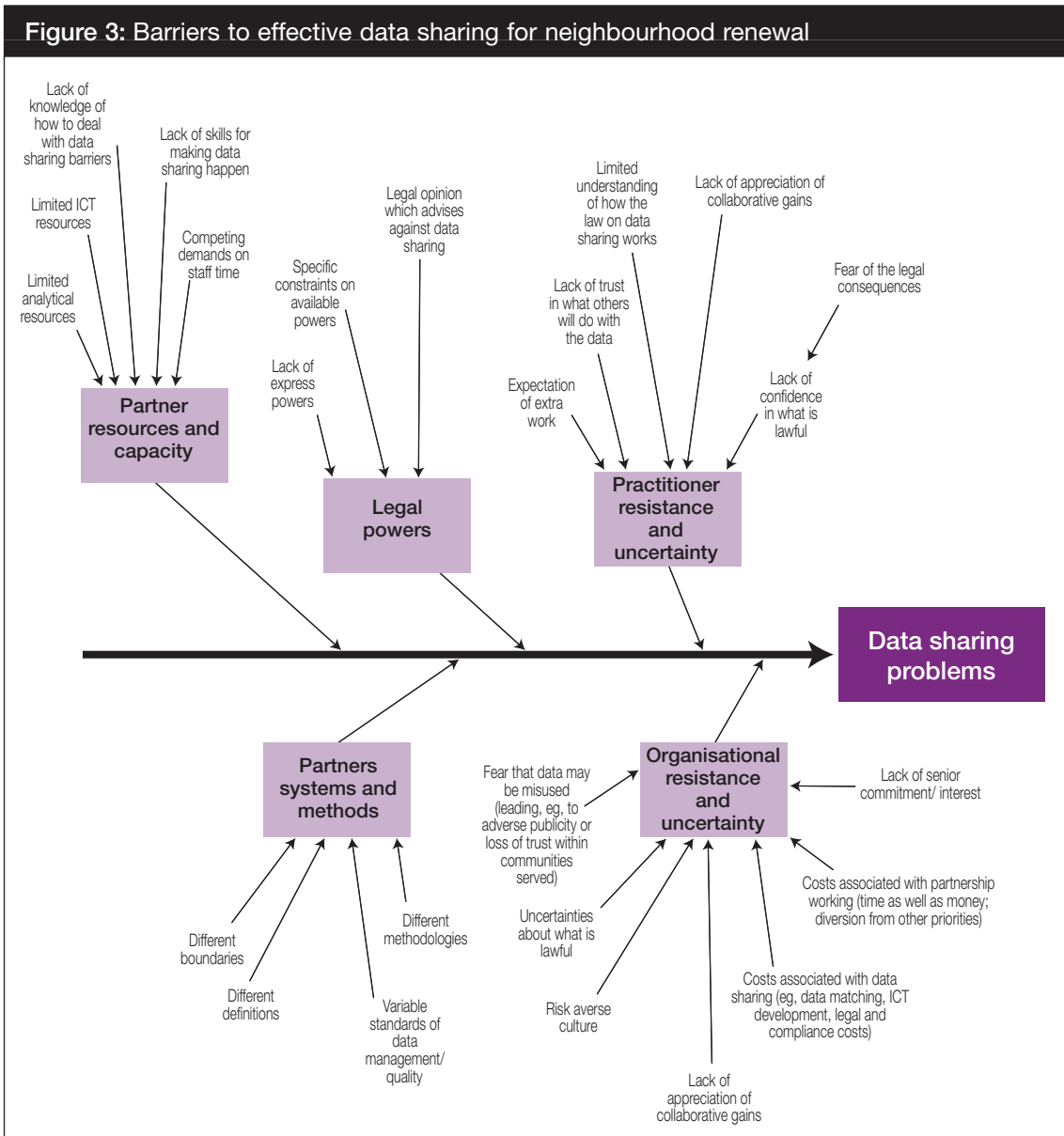


Source: MORI analysis of SEU consultation (see Annex C)

- 5.5 Research by the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, *Data Sharing for Neighbourhood Renewal: Lessons from the North West* (see **Annex H**), found complementary results. The study examined the information sharing activities of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) in Liverpool, Manchester, West Cumbria and Wigan. The partnerships were engaged in a range of different strategic activities – including understanding local needs and opportunities, targeting services, improving service delivery and improving performance management – aimed at addressing different social exclusion themes.
- 5.6 While good practice was found, progress in joining up information held by partner agencies to address these issues was sobering. The report found that there were common issues across the four LSP areas where concerns had been raised about data quality and availability, especially at the neighbourhood level. There was also found to be a need to improve the local ability to track neighbourhood change and assess progress in closing the gap in the poorest neighbourhoods. Some areas for data sharing had been little explored.
- 5.7 The report suggests that barriers to information sharing identified in the Policy Action Team 18 report *Better Information Sharing* in 2000² – such as a low priority given to small area information, confusion about the law and inconsistent geographical referencing of data – continue:

“While there has been this progress [in information sharing] at national and local levels, many of the barriers originally identified by Policy Action Teams during the development of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal persist. Most notably these relate to uncertainties in the minds of practitioners surrounding the Data Protection Act and powers existing in administrative law which permit data sharing.”

- 5.8 As well as legal uncertainties, the report identified barriers concerning poor partner resources and capacity to share information, technical issues – such as differing data definitions or methodologies, partner resistance and uncertainty, and lack of leadership and senior commitment to information sharing (see **Figure 3**).



Source: D. Johnstone et al. *Data Sharing for Neighbourhood Renewal: Lessons from the North West*, (EDuce and Makesfive for the NRU, 2005 (see Annex H))

5.9 Similar evidence comes from the Improvement and Development Agency (I&DeA) commissioned research, *e-Government: reaching socially excluded groups?* This examined the local integration of socially excluded groups into the e-government agenda.³ The report maintains that the priorities for the development of e-government strategies seldom reflect the needs of socially excluded people locally. They are often driven by central targets which take insufficient account of local exclusion problems. While there is a wide range of information available from local partners to inform social exclusion strategies, little of it is being used. The SEU report *Jobs and Enterprise in Deprived Areas* (2004) also suggested that “policy at national, regional and local level is not sufficiently guided by analysis of available evidence,” and that “evidence based delivery is limited”.⁴

Actions to promote information sharing

‘Greater Manchester Against Crime’ (GMAC) has contributed to a **reduction in crime in across Greater Manchester** and has provided an efficient system for partnership working and joining up local services.⁵ GMAC uses ICT to bring together information from a range of partners, including the health service, fire and transport, probation, community safety and local authorities. Information can be quickly analysed to identify and map crime hotspots and determine how best to target resources across partner agencies.

e-Government – the National Strategy

5.10 Some of the actions required here have already been initiated. A considerable amount of good practice to promote data sharing has been driven by the National Strategy for Local e-Government programme. This has provided £675 million (2001-06) to help all local authorities in England to electronically enable all their priority services by December 2005. As local authorities are responsible for delivering 80 per cent of government services this places them at the forefront of e-service delivery for excluded groups.

5.11 As part of this programme there has been an £80 million investment in 22 National Projects that have developed packages of electronic tools, standards and guidance to give all local authorities access to a range of ‘off the shelf’ electronic services. In addition there has been a £24 million investment in e-Innovations projects for local authorities and their partners to develop innovative electronic products. Many of these products and services help to share information and are particularly relevant to excluded citizens, including:

- **FAME (Framework for Multi-Agency Environments)** – which provides a repository of guidance and protocols to facilitate multi-agency working and information sharing. Six pilots used in the development of FAME were all based on exclusion issues: child protection, integrated mental health records, promoting independence for vulnerable older people, children with disabilities, information sharing and assessment for children at risk, and housing benefits inter-working.⁶
- **RYOGENS (Reducing Youth Offending Generic National Solution)** – system to share information about children and young people (see p54).
- **NOTIFY** – project to help agencies share information when transient people move across organisational boundaries (see p29).⁷
- **Customer Relationship Management (CRM)** – support, advice and guidance to help local authorities implement CRM. CRM helps local authorities to join up services around individuals and enables access to services through multiple channels, such as text messages, telephone, face-to-face, and through digital TV.⁸

Action 12: ODPM will consolidate and promote the lessons from the National Projects and e-Innovations work to local authorities.

Local strategy planning

The **effectiveness of regeneration schemes** is assessed by the Manchester Salford Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder's 'Tracking Neighbourhood Change' system.⁹ A GIS (Geographical Information System) based programme review tool is used to assess the impact of regeneration activity. This tool, in conjunction with other review data (including indicators of housing, crime, education and worklessness), helps determine the impacts of regeneration schemes at a local level, and provides an evidence base for future action.

- 5.12 Following their research, the NRU are already taking action to promote and disseminate examples of good practice in strategic planning for neighbourhood renewal:

Action 13: The NRU will develop and promote the lessons from good practice in information sharing for local strategy development and for driving delivery; and will consider giving a higher priority to improving information sharing among LSP partners including as part of the LSP performance framework.

- 5.13 In relation to the sharing and use of information to inform local authority social exclusion strategies, the SEU have commissioned further research to unpack more clearly the benefits of this approach, and how we should take it forward. **Annex F** sets out the principles, and provides a high level table of information sources which could be used to inform a social exclusion strategy. A more detailed guide to local information sources has also been prepared, and is being updated, by the NRU.¹⁰

Action 14: We recommend that local authorities should have regard to guidance as set out at Annex F in drawing up high level social exclusion strategies, and draw on the sources catalogued by the NRU; and that they should ensure appropriate arrangements are put in place with partners to draw on available information.

Safeguarding privacy of personal information

- 5.14 Sharing personal data, as opposed to anonymised strategic data, raises still more complex issues. Consent from individuals is often required to share their personal information, and concerns arise around the balance of the right to privacy against the expectation of efficient and effective government. Citizens, including excluded citizens as shown in **Chapter 2**, increasingly expect the public sector to provide more seamless and personalised services to address the needs of particular groups in society and to tackle specific problems. Our focus groups found that excluded groups cite much frustration with existing services, which better use and sharing of personal data could alleviate. We could also expect personal information to be used more pro-actively to promote preventative services.
- 5.15 Here we might contrast the position in the private sector, where supermarkets and other big businesses make considerable use of personal information about their customers to plan and target marketing campaigns, stock shelves in anticipation of demand, and maximise the sales to new and existing customers. The implications of 'life in the surveillance society' have provoked concerns about privacy and the ethical use of personal information, including from the National Consumer Council and in the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) *Digital Manifesto*.^{11,12}

- 5.16 This balance of privacy and effectiveness needs to be addressed directly. *Transformational Government* proposes the creation of a ‘privacy committee’ to consider and advise on areas of difficulty in data sharing. Maintaining trust between excluded service users and providers is critical in reaching the hardest to reach clients, who may already have had experiences of dealing with public authorities. Errors made regarding the use of personal information or apparent infringement of privacy significantly undermines the trust of socially excluded clients. Therefore, it is important to ensure personal information is handled responsibly.

Action 15: The e-Government Unit’s *Transformational Government* report will recommend the appointment of Customer Group Directors for key customer groups to lead the design of services and to represent the interests of their customers across Government. We recommend that these customer directors are given specific responsibility and authority to ensure effective, joined up delivery to socially excluded people within their groups, including in the areas of child protection, substance misuse, and social isolation of frail elderly people.

- 5.17 To supplement this approach, the National Consumer Council advocates the use of tools such as ‘privacy impact assessments’ to assess information risks and build into protection systems.

Action 16: We recommend government investigate tools and methodologies, such as privacy impact assessments, to help practitioners more easily safeguard the privacy of client’s personal information while giving them greater confidence to share personal information with other organisations.

Addressing technical barriers

Sharing information about children and young people at risk of offending and alerting agencies to the need for intervention is done by the ‘Reducing Youth Offending Generic National Solution’ (RYOGENS).¹³ A web based system allows professionals from different agencies to record and share low level concerns about individuals. When the number or nature of concerns crosses a risk threshold, an alert is triggered for practitioners to co-ordinate a response across the partner agencies.

- 5.18 Technical barriers such as differing data definitions, partner ICT systems and methods pose a major obstacle to data sharing and effective e-government. A roadmap to address these technical issues already forms a part of *Transformational Government* and the issues have also been addressed as part of the National Strategy for local e-government programme Priority Outcomes. Additional actions of particular relevance to geographical concentrations of deprivation are:

Action 17: We recommend that government explores action to ensure the provision of a controlled vocabulary for social exclusion themes, groups and individuals, to enable practitioners from the public, third and private sector dealing with excluded groups to more easily share information across partner agencies.

- 5.19 One paradoxical finding from our research, highlighting technical difficulties, was that there were some apparently ‘joined up’ services making innovative use of ICT to provide a seamless customer facing front end, which did not link to back office systems. Once the customer had left the ‘one stop’ office, the constraints of old (‘legacy’) processing systems meant that information collected was **printed out and manually re-keyed into several old back office systems** – needlessly duplicating staff effort. This is why we need *Transformational Government*.

Clarifying legal uncertainty

Not sharing information not only fails to realise the potential for improved services but can also lead to services not being provided at all. In some cases this could prove fatal. In October 2003, pensioners George (89) and Gertrude (86) Bates were found dead in their south London home. Earlier that same month British Gas had disconnected their gas supply due to an unpaid bill of £140. Over cautious interpretation of data protection legislation played a major part in preventing British Gas from informing Social Services.¹⁴

- 5.20 Recent high profile cases such as the Soham and Climbié murders have highlighted the importance of improved sharing of personal information and the need for clarity regarding legislation. Uncertainty about legal powers is central to lack of progress, and relevant to both strategic and personal data. Current understanding of legislation can make doing nothing an easier option where sharing information is seen as risky and there is a fear of being sued. Among many practitioners there is a perception that legal concerns and in particular, the Data Protection Act, are used as an excuse to not share information.

“There’s a lot of hiding behind the DPA [Data Protection Act]. Partly the legal aspect, partly people being ‘less than adventurous’, but also some use it as an excuse for not doing work.” (Public sector, local service provider)¹⁵

“Often the words ‘data protection’ are bandied about as an excuse for not sharing any kind of information at all.” (Public sector, local service provider)¹⁶

- 5.21 NRU research highlights considerable uncertainty among practitioners and a lack of confidence in what is lawful. This would suggest that current information sharing guidance, particularly concerning legal issues, is part of the problem.
- 5.22 Major flaws can be identified in current information sharing guidance from across government and other organisations. Many guidance notes are poorly written, over complicated, unfocused, too detailed and/or rambling. Interpretation of the law and messages for practitioners can be varied and confusing so as to leave practitioners to make of it what they will, and much guidance offers no legal advice or guidance at all. When reference is made to relevant legislation, in most cases it is found to simply reproduce what the law says rather than translate it to an operational context. Some guidance emphasises, incorrectly, that all information is confidential and sharing can only take place in exceptional circumstances. **Few examples of guidance are written with a positive emphasis on sharing information.**

- 5.23 While guidance cannot be produced for every circumstance of potential information exchange, more tailored and specific guidance should be produced for practitioners working with socially excluded groups. For example, cross-government practitioner guidance on information sharing for children and young people is due to be published by the DfES in January 2006. Such specific guidance should be replicated for other vulnerable groups, such as disadvantaged adults and vulnerable older people.

Action 18: We recommend government investigate and identify where additional policy and legal guidance is required on information sharing and initiate and monitor the delivery of such guidance. Particular consideration should be paid to social exclusion themes.

Housing and Council Tax Benefit data

Identifying which welfare benefits you may be entitled to is made easier by the ‘e-Benefits National Project’.^{16a} Web based software has been developed which allows citizens or intermediaries on their behalf to find out what welfare benefits they are entitled to. The benefits calculator can assess eligibility across the 61 welfare benefits in a one-stop assessment that cuts across benefits administered by both local authorities and central government departments.

- 5.24 One key area of information sharing identified as beneficial by practitioners is between the DWP and local authorities, where similar information is collected for both Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit, and a range of income related benefits. This has been the subject of enormous comment, complaint, and pilot initiatives for joint working. Action is already in hand:

Action 19: The DWP intends to take additional powers in forthcoming primary legislation on Housing Benefit to enable greater sharing of common information between central government and local government, in respect of information for income related benefits, and other areas.

Action 20: We recommend building on work around the feasibility of online benefits calculators/eligibility checkers and integrated claiming processes such as the work undertaken by the Benefits National Project led by Rotherham MBC.

Negative organisational cultures

- 5.25 Cultural resistance to sharing information needs to be clearly addressed. Within some organisations there is a view that “knowledge is power and that it should be kept to one’s own team or organisation.”¹⁷ This can create a tendency to hoard information to avoid giving away any power and/or decision making ability to others. Organisations can also be reluctant to release information for fear that it might embarrass or highlight any organisational weakness or failure. Resistance to sharing can also occur when there is a lack of trust between organisations regarding how data will be used by partner agencies.

- 5.26 The Government needs to state clearly that **information sharing is a priority – and a position of unnecessary or excessive caution is contrary to the aim of delivering effective service improvements**, particularly for excluded groups with the most to gain from sharing personal details. Consequently more needs to be done to promote effective information sharing and publicise new and existing guidance, and disseminate it to all agencies with a responsibility for tackling social exclusion.

Action 21: We recommend that government develop a core communications strategy regarding personal information sharing for practitioners and the public to convey the message that information sharing is positive and should be encouraged. We also recommend that government develop specific communications strategies to promote the better use and exchange of information.

Leadership and senior commitment

- 5.27 Strategic leadership locally is also a key driver to implement organisational change. NRU research highlights that local leaders can do much to create the conditions under which information is valued and used effectively and information sharing can thrive. Poor levels of understanding and take up of the opportunities afforded by ICT indicate a current leadership failure and a future challenge. At senior levels, leaders of organisations “face a steep learning curve” to understand and adapt to the pace of technological change.
- 5.28 For some organisations, the obstacles to information sharing are very significant, while for others they are less so. Where organisations struggle to overcome barriers to information sharing there tends to be weak strategic leadership and an absence of a ‘can do’ attitude. Some leaders are averse to taking risks and fail to see opportunities or find reasons not to do things. The success of information sharing projects is highly reliant upon the level of senior ‘buy in’ across partner agencies.
- 5.29 In the public health and social care arena, senior professionals act as Caldicott Guardians with a strategic role for the management of patient information, including agreeing and reviewing protocols, and governing the protection, use and disclosure of patient information.* Such senior involvement regarding the management of information has recently been called for by the National Consumer Council to extend the model of Caldicott Guardians throughout the rest of the public sector.¹⁸ Part of the National Strategy for Local e-Government programme has called on local authorities to stipulate an information sharing officer to proactively promote data sharing and find solutions to local barriers.

Action 22: We recommend government review and seek to implement measures to achieve greater strategic leadership and senior buy in regarding the use and exchange of personal information in the public sector locally and nationally.

* The Department of Health’s 1997 ‘Report of the review of patient identifiable information’ produced by the Caldicott Committee, chaired by Dame Fiona Caldicott, outlined the requirement for NHS organisations to appoint Caldicott Guardians of patient information.

Cost

- 5.30 Resistance to information sharing also occurs due to poor understanding of costs, and likely returns. Considerable business efficiencies can result from effective use of ICT. Nevertheless the actual cost to make ICT systems compatible can be seen as a significant barrier to information sharing. Compliance costs or costs to make IT systems compatible were identified as a major barrier by respondents to our consultation (see **Figure 2**). Costs associated with making information available to share, such as reformatting or data cleansing can also be prohibitive.
- 5.31 Perceptions of cost may also be associated with perceptions of risk, where fears exist that others may misinterpret, or misuse data, or that sensitive information supplied to a partner be made public under the Freedom of Information Act. Findings from the NRU research conclude that “people may consciously or subconsciously weigh up the costs and benefits of sharing data” and “... may not appreciate the potential gains”, or in some cases, “...may expect to gain without contributing themselves.”¹⁹
- 5.32 The business case for ensuring the application of available technology to excluded groups often involves identifying what can be marginal costs to the development of new generic systems, delivering potentially high benefits. These business cases are seldom found.

Action 23: A business case tool for the initial analysis and identification of financial and social benefits is made available alongside this report. Service deliverers are urged to review the tool and consider how it may help provide support for these initiatives.

Authentication and identity management

- 5.33 Using and sharing personal data also requires clear standards of authentication and identity management. Service providers need to know that the clients they are dealing with are who they say they are and be able to access information relevant to that person. Similarly, service providers, including those from the third sector, need to be formally recognised to allow efficient communication between organisations.
- 5.34 Government Connect is a new programme which delivers a range of electronic tools and standards to help local authorities improve efficiency and improve communications with citizens, with each other and with central government.²⁰ Identity management and authentication are key elements of Government Connect, building upon the Government Gateway. A ‘citizens account’ is also part of the programme, and provides people with a single point of access to information about the range of services they are engaged with or entitled to. Accounts can be accessed online or through local authority contact centres. With the consent of the citizen, service providers can use the accounts to find out basic client information such as contact details and background case or service use history to help join up services and avoid asking the same questions over and over again. Employees, businesses and community groups can set up similar accounts to improve their contact with local and central government.

- 5.35 The Government Connect system has already been adopted by the majority of local authorities. This report does not advocate any particular technical solution – **but getting excluded people to sign up to such a system is of enormous importance to us**. The people most likely to benefit from joining up information are those who are socially excluded. If this is to work effectively then excluded people need to activate their Government Connect accounts, and give their consent to the full range of information sharing which will follow from such engagement. This will also justify the needed investment in systems, protocols, and partnerships to enable joined up services.
- 5.36 **Achieving this will be difficult but is essential**. A campaign must be undertaken to ensure that every excluded citizen signs up for the emerging raft of joined up services. The system may well permit, where the person agrees, access to the combined records in health, police, housing, social services, and other third sector contacts. Also, proactive identification of possible service entitlement and targeted invitations to apply for services may be possible, as well as third party agencies accessing and updating information on their behalf.
- 5.37 The engagement of private and third sector agencies in the system will also potentially involve considerable investment to enable them to achieve suitable accreditation and expertise to participate in the new systems. But that would also be an immensely worthwhile step.

Action 24: Immediate steps should be taken, as part of the work ensuing from the Digital Challenge and the e-Government Unit's *Transformational Strategy* to ensure that benefits of engagement with Government Connect are clearly and actively explained, with the aim of ensuring that all excluded individuals have active accounts so that they can enjoy the benefits of joined up government. In addition the development of the Government Connect Identity Management systems should give priority to progressing work on products of particular relevance to excluded groups such as movement of records for frequent movers, virtual storage of records of people with complex needs, and the exchange of information for clients with multiple exclusion needs including their authorised advisers.

Claims tracking

- 5.38 One key benefit of systems such as Government Connect will be the ability of client advisers, such as the Citizen Advice Bureau, to have access to information about the progress of client applications for services or benefits. Much adviser time, and public sector time, is spent chasing information about whether a case is awaiting information, pending decision, or otherwise stuck in the system. This time is a diversion from investment in processing, affects both local and national government, and is essentially time wasted (and has been since the time clerical officers spent their time looking for files in local offices). While it would be good to think this problem will be solved simply by abolishing backlogs, this is unlikely to happen. A lack of information compounds excluded client's feeling of isolation and helplessness and may put off further engagement with service providers.

Action 25: As part of e-Government Unit’s Transformational Strategy and the development of Government Connect, consideration should be given to developing easy systems (whether Internet, text, or fixed line or mobile telephone based) to enable clients or their advisers to check on progress of transactions such as benefit claims without having to divert resources from the processing process.

User involvement in design of services

- 5.39 Part of this process is to identify how services should be designed and delivered to progress the e-Government programme. At the level of overall government strategy, *Transformational Government* sets out a number of significant proposals for user involvement in the design and development of services. This report has set out the specific and different aspects of digital inclusion for excluded groups and **Action 14** of this report will seek to address this issue.

Protocols

The FAME National Project (see p52) provides a generic tool kit for this type of protocol agreement. The tool kit is an interactive web based repository of guidance to implementing multi-agency information sharing. It includes nine key areas for organisations to consider for effective multi-agency working: scoping and business case, legal powers and responsibility, governance, information sharing, identity management, infrastructure, messages events and transactions, federation and sustainability. FAME was developed based on a range of social exclusion themed pilot projects, and is a highly relevant tool to facilitate joined up working and information sharing for social exclusion.

- 5.40 The final piece of this jigsaw is that of **local partnership** arrangements between partners to share and act on information about excluded clients. **Chapter 3** set out the importance of **identifying ‘triggers’ to action responses** and interventions locally. Information sharing for excluded groups is often a matter of building partnerships to identify early action to head off crisis.
- 5.41 Building these partnerships requires detailed agreements to be drawn up setting out not only the purpose of the exercise but also the agreement on who will be responsible for keeping information up to date, what types of triggers will operate when risks are spotted, and what actions will be taken.
- 5.42 These agreements, or protocols, play a major role in ensuring those involved know what can and cannot be shared, and agreeing the legal basis for sharing. The absence of formal protocols between agencies wishing to share information can act as a significant barrier to information sharing.

“The Government continually tells us that we must utilise and provide a multi-agency service but provides very little guidance as how best to set up protocols on the sharing of information.” (Public sector, local service provider)²¹

5.43 Our consultation found that “... service providers, especially in the third sector, often **do not trust** other bodies that they are sharing [the] information with”.²² Respondents highlighted a lack of trust in partner agencies as a significant barrier to sharing information (see **Figure 2**). Concerns over trust occur when there are expectations within an organisation that others will not be able to treat information with professional integrity and skill or that others will use information inappropriately or for the wrong purpose – in their opinion. Trust can be built up through the process of establishing protocols, which set out exactly what each partner should and can do.

“Trust is a key issue in this work, both internally to organisations as well as with external partners. Clear protocols help.” (Voluntary sector/charity)²³

5.44 The other problem here is to identify which triggers are most significant. This is a problem of understanding the triggers and drivers of exclusion, and the effective interventions which can prevent a worsening of the problem, or bring immediate relief. Considerable work has been done in a range of social exclusion themes to understand risk factors and effective preventative action. But much more can be done to develop this understanding. This is one of the key challenges in data sharing for excluded groups – the identification of the primary indicators of risk, and an understanding of how to respond. This is why work to deliver ICT enabled services to excluded groups is so important, but equally so difficult.

Action 26: We recommend that further work be done by ODPM and local authorities to develop more protocol agreement frameworks for local partnerships along the FAME, or similar, model. These should include advice on key trigger points for early intervention.

Conclusions

5.45 The potential benefits for service providers to more effectively and efficiently meet the needs of excluded individuals and co-ordinate service delivery through ICT and e-government enabled information sharing is huge. While isolated examples of good practice exist, a whole raft of barriers prevent current information sharing and perhaps more importantly, prevent practitioners from contemplating the possibilities to share information. However, actions already in place and those initiated here seek to address these major barriers, including legal uncertainty, privacy concerns, technical barriers, cultural, leadership and partnership issues, to help realise the benefits of information sharing for excluded groups.

CHAPTER 6

Delivery and partnership

Summary

There are many successful initiatives and examples of good practice that use ICT to empower and meet the needs of excluded individuals and improve service delivery (as shown in **Chapter 3** and throughout this report). This chapter explores how existing good practice and future innovation can be promoted and rolled out more widely.

It also highlights that the private and third sectors, in partnership with central and local government, have a key role to play in addressing digital exclusion and providing innovation and content to help tackle social exclusion through ICT.

Introduction

- 6.1 This chapter considers how to build on the success of existing ICT based initiatives that tackle social exclusion and explores how to take forward good practice. The role of the private and third sectors is also highlighted as critical in extending the benefits of ICT to excluded groups and in promoting digital inclusion.

How can we roll out good practice?

- 6.2 Evidence collected as part of this study suggests that the types of initiatives outlined in **Chapter 3** and **Annexes E, H and I**, often exist in isolation, frequently fail to develop from a pilot phase, and are seldom rolled out to a wider audience or replicated in other locations or service sectors. Projects are often poorly evaluated, if at all, and in some cases basic information about costs and intended benefits are lacking. Few initiatives are widely publicised or promoted among service users or delivery agents who may wish to replicate such initiatives. Findings from our commissioned review of international initiatives discovered that in some cases initiatives were struggling to continue operating and some projects had recently closed down, despite their apparent success.¹
- 6.3 This report also highlights the very small amount of research literature regarding ICT and excluded groups – seemingly because existing literature generally assumes that the benefits and impacts of ICT are the same for all users. A few recent studies are beginning to address this.
- 6.4 Research by the I&DeA reviewing activity in English local authorities, also indicates that less than a third of ICT exclusion projects targeted at excluded groups were found to have been systematically evaluated.² Such lack of evaluation can lead to a poor appreciation of the benefits of ICT for social inclusion, poor replication of good practice, or duplication of effort where the experience of past initiatives is not drawn upon.

- 6.5 Our conclusion, drawn from these reports and all our exposure to good ideas throughout the process of preparing this report, is that there are many good initiatives but these often are short term in nature and funding, not properly evaluated, and lacking in robust business cases. They are often, badged ‘technology’ and not ‘service delivery’, distanced from front line managers, dependent on local enthusiasts to promote them and likely to fold if that enthusiast leaves.
- 6.6 The barriers set out in **Chapters 4 and 5** are serious, difficult, and will not be addressed without a clear and persistent strategy to overcome them. A focal point is needed to bring together good practice and initiatives worthy of wider roll out. This should cover not only research and information type activities, but also stimulate communities of users, provide day to day practical advice and support, and engage with government, private sector, and third sector leaders to hammer home the importance of the agenda and the real opportunities available.

Action 27: We propose that Government consider establishing a Digital Inclusion Unit in England. This should be a third sector agency, with local and national representation on the governing body, with the key objectives of identifying and evaluating good practice, providing technical and practical guidance on roll out and implementation of good practice, providing and stimulating leadership on delivery of good practice, and stimulating communities of users and leaders to promote discussion and understanding.

Partnership

- 6.7 Partnership with the private and third sector is crucial here. There is powerful evidence that partnership is vital to reaching disadvantaged and excluded groups and is already shaping government strategy – which is increasingly being built on the recognition that reaching many of those not engaged will require the participation of a wide range of organisations.
- 6.9 The conditions for successful public service delivery make it likely that in the next ten years the boundaries between public, private and voluntary bodies will continue to erode and become less visible to the users of public services. Government will increasingly be positioned at the heart of an extended web of delivery agencies; public, private and third sector – with intermediaries taking on an ever more important role in delivering services on behalf of the Government. **Partnership is becoming an operational necessity in tackling digital exclusion as well as social exclusion.**

An agenda for collaboration on digital inclusion

- 6.10 As a consequence the Government is devoting explicit attention to how it can become a more effective partner of the private and third sectors. For example, the recent *Digital Strategy* recognised the need for a genuinely collaborative approach – with the Government working with and through a wide range of partners:³
- Industry, the ICT industry and industry access sectors
 - Regional Development Agencies (RDA), social enterprise, third sector organisations, local Government and other public bodies

- 6.11 As Alan Michael (Minister of State for the DTD), recently commented: “Every partner’s contribution is vital. Government can provide leadership and help raise awareness, but reaching many of those not engaged will require the participation of a wide range of organisations.”⁴
- 6.12 The leadership challenges for Government are sharp in that organisational and capability weaknesses are discounting some of the positive potential impacts of ICT. Leaders of service delivery face a steep learning curve in deepening their knowledge and appreciation of how best to use technology and information to deliver their goals. This requires them to break down the cultural divide that exists within government agencies between the technologists who understand what ICT can do and service delivery experts. Our review has confirmed that social policy leads across government do not fully understand the benefits of ICT based social inclusion initiatives. *Transformational Government* has acknowledged the need for the development of IT professionalism and skills within government.
- 6.13 The other distinctive leadership challenge for Government is to clarify the unique contribution that the private and third sectors can make in facilitating digital inclusion both now and in the longer term. What can they do best, and what mechanisms do Government need to create to foster and accelerate innovation and embed it within mainstream delivery processes? These issues are now explored.

The private sector

- 6.14 The private sector is of course very diverse, ranging from large multinational companies who are enormously sophisticated consumers and users of ICT – through to small and medium sized enterprises (SME) who may themselves be suffering from their own digital exclusion – lacking, access or awareness of the value and relevance of new ICTs.

Ofcom Consumer Panel Report⁵

While the majority of SMEs are aware of and understand the term ‘broadband’, understanding of the terms ‘3G’, ‘Wi-Fi’ and ‘VoIP’ is negligible.*

Fewer than half of all SMEs keep themselves informed about developments regarding business communications services. While keeping informed is more common among the larger SMEs (with 6-10 employees) this is true of just half in this size category.

Those SMEs least likely to keep informed typically only have a landline for their business, with no business mobile phones and no Internet access. One in three SMEs who do not keep themselves informed could not recall any sources of information on communications services. Online sources of advice and information are more commonly recalled by those SMEs who do keep themselves informed.

* 3G (Third Generation) mobile phone systems provide high-speed data transmission and supporting multimedia applications such as full motion video, video conferencing and Internet access. Wi-Fi (Wireless Fidelity): Short range wireless technologies which allow an over the air connection between a wireless client and a base station, or between two wireless clients. VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol): A technology which allows users to send calls over the Internet.

- 6.15 Overall the UK economy has made excellent progress at being more e-enabled. The *International Benchmarking Study*, released in November 2004, shows that UK businesses are now among the most sophisticated users of ICT in the world.⁶
- 6.16 However, whilst UK plc is discharging its responsibilities to be economically innovative in its use of ICT, it is not necessarily leading efforts to create truly accessible digital environments for a wide range of service users, which is where the private sector can make a distinctive contribution. This is a major obstacle to tackling digital exclusion because it is private firms that have the skills, products, collective intelligence and market understanding required to ensure that ICT driven services are for the many and not the few.

Content and accessibility

- 6.17 Results from our consultation exercise confirm that private sector service providers could do much more to offer accessible and relevant services and products, which would encourage take up not just among socially excluded groups but across the whole population. Normal market dynamics encourage ICT developers to focus more on more profitable mainstream markets than on disadvantaged groups.

“Because ICT is a push market, the private sector is mainly interested in servicing the...mainstream market and not the socially excluded.”

(Public sector, local service provider)⁷

- 6.18 All of this suggests that Government and business need to work together more directly to enable new types of market innovation, both in terms of business models and products focused on excluded groups. A recent analysis of the digital inclusion strategies of over 30 countries revealed an emerging cluster of market enabling interventions that are proving successful in tackling these issues of accessibility and relevant content.⁸ These included:

- Research and Development programmes on ICT usability and applications
- Stimulation of broadband content development
- Support for third sector content development
- Targeted support for specific groups
- Awareness campaigns

- 6.19 **Government will take this forward in the context of the Digital Challenge.**

The third sector

Coping with depression can be a problem for excluded groups. Levels of reported depression are highest within the lowest income groups.⁹ In Australia, ‘depressioNet’ is an independent non-profit organisation providing comprehensive information, help and 24-hour peer support, via the Internet, for Australians living with depression and their families and friends.¹⁰ By integrating web functions such as professionally moderated chatrooms with mental health practices, depressioNet provides a safe, anonymous environment for people living with depression.

- 6.20 The *2002 Spending Review* identified the third sector as a vital partner in government’s attempts to modernise public service delivery and outlined four main areas where the Government and third sector need to jointly tackle to enable the third sector to be an ever more effective partner in delivering services:
- Third sector to be involved in planning stages as well as in delivering services
 - Create long-term strategic partnerships with the third sector
 - Build capacity within the third sector
 - Allow the third sector, as service producers, to cost above marginal costs for services delivered under contract
- 6.21 The Government is working actively with the third sector to help build capacity, including notable investment projects such as ‘ChangeUp’ and ‘Future Builders’.^{11,12} For example, the Active Communities Unit ICT Hub initiative, which is part of the ChangeUp programme, is working to raise awareness of the strategic benefits of ICT to the sector and offer developmental and procurement support for the sector as a whole. All of this work is vital to help create an ICT enabled third sector.
- 6.22 The nature of partnership work already underway confirms that the third sector has particular strengths in terms of delivering to disadvantaged groups. These include high levels of trust, its flexibility in terms of delivery models, and its broad perspective on defining outcomes and measuring success. Vitality for government, third sector providers are often able to respond more quickly to new concerns, needs, and groups than the inevitably stickier delivery and accountability processes of public sector agencies.
- 6.23 All of these strengths are at play in the sector’s work tackling digital exclusion – with current practice suggesting a distinctive role for third sector bodies – namely brokerage. The third sector is not the only means of providing personal advice and intermediaries, but has a unique role in being able to advocate as well as inform from a position outside government, and hence question and challenge in a way public sector workers cannot.
- 6.24 The sector’s brokerage role has two dimensions:
- Firstly, the ability to reach disadvantaged groups and connect them to a whole range of services, including those offered online. Indeed, building the necessary social networks and trust relationships that reduce social isolation and exclusion is a key operational characteristic of the sector.

- Secondly, the ability of the sector to broker relationships across the sector itself, and with the broader public and private sectors, in order to champion new approaches and initiatives.

6.25 In terms of reaching the digitally excluded, the third sector plays a crucial role in bringing ICT to particular hard to reach client groups. Many socially excluded individuals lack the skills, confidence and required level of social capital to access or make the best use of online resources and services. To do so effectively and automatically they need trusted advisers to support their ICT usage on the matters that are important to them. Thus being a gateway to online support groups and services, and the provision of useful, reliable information, are all essential components of bringing socially excluded people into the digital age.

6.26 In practical terms this can involve the following activities:

- Brokering the interaction between socially excluded people and existing services.
- Acting as an alternative service provider. For example, offering an employability package of training that differs from the statutory sector, but clearly links to their resources.
- Delivering broad based learning and service delivery brokerage – which is a broader process than signposting and supporting individuals into learning opportunities or towards relevant services. It also encompasses building confidence, ensuring supporting resources are available (e.g. crèche facilities, transport, language or disability support, etc) and fostering relationships with a plethora of delivery stakeholders in order to ensure that the individual or group is well supported and encouraged throughout.

6.27 While the value of these brokerage roles are becoming clear in tackling digital exclusion, particularly in terms of widening participation and take up, the funding streams for these types of work remain under-developed.

6.28 The sector has an equally vital role in brokering and championing new initiatives and approaches. The third sector has become powerfully involved in numerous projects to promote social inclusion through ICT. These include serving as UK online centres, developing innovative content, serving ICT markets where the mainstream ICT sector is less active and innovating in service delivery. Some of these examples are featured in **Chapter 3**.^{13,14}

6.29 These success factors are rarely in happy alignment and most innovation in the sector is occurring in spite of, rather than because of, supporting frameworks. Our analysis suggests that better mechanisms need to be found to help clarify funding and policy for this area of work as well as ensuring better join-up at the national and regional levels – and ensure that central and local government works with rather than in competition with the third sector.

Action 28: The Social Exclusion Unit in consultation with the Active Communities Unit within the Home Office will promote and publicise the funding streams available for innovative development in the third sector.

- 6.30 Additionally the spread of innovations and partnerships in this field should be encouraged through work with cross sector bodies (where the third sector is strongly represented). The establishment of a new Digital Inclusion Unit (see **Action 27**) will further assist with this process.

Conclusions

- 6.31 We have detailed a powerful agenda for collaborative action between the public, private and third sectors that if properly embraced will promote digital and social inclusion. Real progress is already being made, but Government must do more to focus its own efforts, and those of others, on the key barriers to greater digital inclusion. Good policy making is proving to be a necessary but not sufficient condition to tackle the challenge of digital inclusion – effective cross-sectoral partnership is the other essential ingredient for success.

CHAPTER 7

Action plan

Actions and key recommendations

- 7.1 This report has set out the Government's strategy for helping to address the barriers to digital inclusion and to ensuring that e-government delivery is equitable and reaches all of society. The analysis outlined in this report represents an important advance in our understanding of the needs of excluded people.
- 7.2 It is clear that the way to deal with the problems that we have identified is to build on the enormous amount of good work which is already going on and the following list of actions will do just that.
- 7.3 Actions and analysis identified within this report are for national and local government to take forward to inform the design and delivery of services for excluded people.
- 7.4 The Implementation team within the SEU retains a role after publication in taking forward the action plan in this report by:
- monitoring the progress made by other government departments on individual action points; and,
 - ensuring that the overarching goals contained within the report are pursued across Government.
- 7.5 The team will continue to work alongside delivery departments to ensure that a focus on digital inclusion is maintained as new policy develops.
- 7.6 Progress will be overseen by Ministers on the Domestic Affairs (Communities) Cabinet Committee, who have agreed the report and its action plan.

Actions and Recommendations	Policy Area	Owning Department
Chapter 3: What's possible and what works		
Action 1: We recommend that local authorities consider the following list of priority ICT based activities to improve service delivery and outcomes for socially excluded groups:		
1.1 Make more effective use of data to tackle social exclusion, including Neighbourhood Statistics and locally available data for service delivery, strategy planning and review and evaluation of interventions. See Chapter 5 for a more detailed discussion of ICT enabled information use/exchange for strategy planning.	Better Strategic Planning	
1.2 In setting out their services, provide a range of access channels for excluded groups to contact the authority and other local service providers, providing information and advice on local services. These channels include face to face, the Internet, e-mail, telephone and text message.	Access and Availability	
1.3 In doing business with excluded groups, offer a range of access channels including e-mail, telephone and text message – for example, to notify registered citizens of employment/training opportunities, appointment reminders, local information/events, school truancy.	Customer Centric Service Delivery	
1.4 Ensure that full use is made of ICT and customer relationship management systems to explore and expand single points of contact for health and social care, housing, money and benefits issues – so excluded individuals can easily access the services they need and not have to identify and contact a range of different departments.	Access and Availability	
1.5 Actively identify the need and opportunities to securely share personal information about vulnerable people across trusted partner agencies. This could focus on identifying early signs of crises and triggers for co-ordinated responses (e.g. RYOGENS (p53)). Priority groups could include: children and young people, disadvantaged adults (including those with health and housing problems or at risk of offending), and vulnerable older people. This work involves using and developing information sharing protocols.	Data Sharing	
1.6 Allow citizen information to be securely shared with other local authorities when people move – to ensure people's 'case histories' are maintained to inform service need/delivery in their new area (e.g. Notify (p29)).	Data Sharing	
1.7 Actively promote local voluntary and community services and sources of information (e.g. NetMums website (p34) or the Crisis virtual life portfolio (p32)) to complement statutory services and extend the reach of non-statutory ICT based initiatives which tackle social exclusion themes. Also, to work closer with the third sector to avoid duplication of ICT initiatives.	Third Sector Services	
1.8 Local authorities and Local Strategic Partnerships should, Build on the Department of Health target for telecare to be available in all homes that need it by December 2010 by exploring the potential to bundle additional ICT facilities with these telecare packages – for example to provide people with home access to the Internet and e-mail. (see p33 Chapter 3 and p44 Chapter 4)	Access and Availability	
1.9 Use ICT to facilitate remote working to allow staff to work more in the community and help hard to reach groups in their own homes (e.g. Project Nomad (p28)).	Service Delivery	
1.10 Encourage excluded individuals to make better use of local ICT facilities (e.g. UK online centres or ICT available in local libraries/community centres) to keep in touch with friends and family and foster communities of interest through ICT to help combat social isolation.	Marketing	

Actions and Recommendations	Policy Area	Owning Department
Chapter 4: Barriers and Actions to improve access		
<p>Action 2: The Digital Challenge, launched in the autumn 2005, should ensure the development of a world class example of digital inclusion benefiting one region, city or similar sized area to drive forward the use of technologies and extend the benefits to all citizens including the most disadvantaged.</p>	<p>Access and Availability</p>	<p>ODPM</p>
<p>Action 3: Promoting the use of metrics to help inform the commitment to review the digital divide in 2008. Government will also engage in further discussion to examine the possibility of including a digital indicator in the 2006 'Opportunity for all' report.</p>	<p>Metrics</p>	<p>Cross Government</p>
<p>Action 4: ODPM to monitor how local e-government strategies are meeting the needs of excluded groups through the IEG5 section 2 returns from local authorities. In addition IEG5 will promote the good practice initiatives identified as part of this report.</p>	<p>Digital Inclusion – Promoting Best Practice</p>	<p>ODPM</p>
<p>Action 5: We recommend that central and local government use existing UK online centres in areas of disadvantage to design and test new online services to ensure fit-for-purpose for socially excluded groups.</p>	<p>Service Design</p>	<p>Cross Government</p>
<p>Action 6: Through the 'UK online regional e-government project', Ufi will investigate the benefits of UK online public internet access points and their user support services, as a means of delivering e-government service to excluded groups. The project will present to government and delivery agents a cost benefit analysis to inform future partnership and funding arrangements for UK online centres.</p>	<p>Access and Availability</p>	<p>Cross Government and Ufi</p>
<p>Action 7: We recommend that the specification and planning requirement for each homeless hostel, children's home, sheltered housing scheme, NRU Neighbourhood community centre and similar focal points for delivering services to disadvantaged groups should include the provision of a wireless broadband 'hotspot'. Local authorities should consider prioritising these facilities for support in ICT provision to enable jobsearch and educational ICT provision. Progress towards this should form part of the targets for delivering the Digital Strategy.</p>	<p>Access and Availability</p>	<p>ODPM</p>
<p>Action 8: We recommend that telecare systems should include broadband connections into people's homes and should always look to bundle in other Internet capabilities, such as e-mail and local information feeds to help users stay connected to their local community.</p>	<p>Access and Availability</p>	<p>DoH</p>
<p>Action 9: DTI are producing new guidance to improve the accessibility of UK government websites, and the ODPM will consider how best to promote the implementation of this guidance to improve the accessibility of local authority websites.</p>	<p>Accessibility</p>	<p>Cross Government</p>
<p>Action 10: We recommend that all government departments and local authorities engage with the MyGuide project to improve access to their services and take forward the key principles for providing accessible and usable e-services. We also recommend that Government Departments and Local Authorities adopt the Myguide provision to simplify the services they provide, including using Myguide as a signpost to their services; ensuring that content standards are put in place using the findings from the Myguide pilot.</p>	<p>Accessibility</p>	<p>DfES</p>

Actions and Recommendations	Policy Area	Owning Department
<p>Action 11: We recommend that a priority will be given within the Digital Challenge to behavioural research focused on excluded individuals, and that results are considered as part of the Digital Divide review in 2008. The Digital Challenge competition will act as a test bed to develop a better understanding of the behaviours and attitudes of excluded groups, which is essential to engage them with e-government and ICT.</p>	<p>Content</p>	<p>ODPM</p>
<p>Chapter 5: Barriers and Actions Around Information Sharing</p>		
<p>Action 12: ODPM will consolidate and promote the lessons from the National Projects and e-Innovations work to local authorities.</p>	<p>Better Strategic Planning and Integrating Services</p>	<p>ODPM</p>
<p>Action 13: The NRU will develop and promote the lessons from good practice in information sharing for local strategy development and for driving delivery; and will consider giving a higher priority to improving information sharing among LSP partners including as part of the LSP performance framework.</p>	<p>Better Strategic Planning and Integrating services</p>	<p>ODPM (NRU)</p>
<p>Action 14: We recommend that local authorities should have regard to guidance as set out at Annex F in drawing up high level social exclusion strategies, and draw on the sources catalogued by NRU; and that they should ensure appropriate arrangements are put in place with partners to draw on the information.</p>	<p>Better Strategic Planning and Integrating services</p>	<p>ODPM</p>
<p>Action 15: The e-Government Unit's <i>Transformational Government</i> report will recommend the appointment of Customer Group Directors for key customer groups to lead the design of services and to represent the interests of their customers across Government. We recommend that these customer directors are given specific responsibility and authority to ensure effective, joined up delivery to socially excluded people within their groups, including in the areas of child protection, substance misuse, and social isolation of frail elderly people.</p>	<p>Customer Centric Service Delivery</p>	<p>Cross Government</p>
<p>Action 16: We recommend government investigate tools and methodologies, such as privacy impact assessments, to help practitioners more easily safeguard the privacy of client's personal information while giving them greater confidence to share personal information with other organisations.</p>	<p>Data Sharing</p>	<p>Cross Government</p>
<p>Action 17: We recommend that government explores action to ensure the provision of a controlled vocabulary for social exclusion themes, groups and individuals, to enable practitioners from the public, third and private sector dealing with excluded groups to more easily share information across partner agencies.</p>	<p>Data Sharing</p>	<p>Cross Government</p>
<p>Action 18: We recommend government investigate and identify where additional policy and legal guidance is required on information sharing and initiate and monitor the delivery of such guidance. Particular consideration should be paid to social exclusion themes.</p>	<p>Data Sharing</p>	<p>Cross Government</p>
<p>Action 19: DWP intends to take additional powers in forthcoming primary legislation on Housing Benefit to enable greater sharing of common information between central government and local government, in respect of information for income related benefits, and other areas.</p>	<p>Data Sharing</p>	<p>DWP</p>
<p>Action 20: We recommend building on work around the feasibility of online benefits calculators/eligibility checkers and integrated claiming processes such as the work undertaken by the Benefits National Project led by Rotherham MBC.</p>	<p>Integrated Online Services</p>	<p>ODPM</p>

Actions and Recommendations	Policy Area	Owning Department
<p>Action 21: We recommend that government develop a core communications strategy regarding personal information sharing for practitioners and the public to convey the message that information sharing is positive and should be encouraged. We also recommend that government develop specific communications strategies to promote the better use and exchange of information.</p>	<p>Data Sharing</p>	<p>Cross Government</p>
<p>Action 22: We recommend government review and seek to implement measures to achieve greater strategic leadership and senior buy in regarding the use and exchange of personal information in the public sector locally and nationally.</p>	<p>Data Sharing</p>	<p>Cross Government</p>
<p>Action 23: A business case tool for the initial analysis and identification of financial and social benefits is made available alongside this report. Service deliverers are urged to review the tool and consider how it may help provide support for these initiatives.</p>	<p>ICT Cost Benefit Analysis</p>	<p>ODPM (SEU)</p>
<p>Action 24: Immediate steps should be taken, as part of the work ensuing from the Digital Challenge and the e-Government Unit's Transformational Strategy to ensure that benefits of engagement with Government Connect are clearly and actively explained, with the aim of ensuring that all excluded individuals have active accounts so that they can enjoy the benefits of joined up government. In addition the development of the Government Connect Identity Management systems should give priority to progressing work on products of particular relevance to excluded groups such as movement of records for frequent movers, virtual storage of records of people with complex needs, and the exchange of information for clients with multiple exclusion needs including their authorised advisers.</p>	<p>Service Design</p>	<p>ODPM/eGU</p>
<p>Action 25: As part of e-Government Unit's Transformational Strategy and the development of Government Connect, consideration should be given to developing easy systems (whether Internet, text, or fixed line or mobile telephone based) to enable clients or their advisers to check on progress of transactions such as benefit claims without having to divert resources from the processing process.</p>	<p>Service Design</p>	<p>ODPM/eGU</p>
<p>Action 26: We recommend that further work be done by ODPM and local authorities to develop more protocol agreement frameworks for local partnerships along the FAME, or similar, model. These should include advice on key trigger points for early intervention.</p>	<p>Service Design</p>	<p>ODPM</p>
<p>Chapter 6: Delivery and Partnership</p>		
<p>Action 27: Government will consider establishing a Digital Inclusion Unit in England. This should be a third sector agency, with local and national representation on the governing body, with the key objectives of identifying and evaluating good practice, providing technical and practical guidance on rollout and implementation of good practice, providing and stimulating leadership on delivery of good practice, and stimulating communities of users and leaders to promote discussion and understanding.</p>	<p>Digital inclusion</p>	<p>ODPM</p>
<p>Action 28: The Social Exclusion Unit in consultation with the Active Communities Unit within the Home Office will promote and publicise the funding streams available for innovative development in the third sector.</p>	<p>Innovation</p>	<p>ODPM (SEU)</p>

ANNEX A

ICT and social inclusion

SWOT analysis

There are some real *strengths* to build on:

- **The UK is among the best in Europe at providing and developing public services online** – UK ranked 3rd out of 28 for online public service sophistication, and 3rd best in a table of 191 for e-government readiness
- There is a **fertile business and development market, and a good regulatory structure** to stimulate the development of new products to address exclusion
- The Government **prioritises the reduction of poverty and inequality** and through SEU and other research has an informed view on exclusion
- The **benefits for social inclusion through the use of ICT is becoming recognised** within central and local government, and the third sector (i.e. much good practice already exists)
- The Governments Gershon **efficiency agenda** relies on ICT to deliver savings – a focus on excluded groups can be added a little marginal cost
- **There is a large existing infrastructure of public ICT access facilities.** 6,000 UK online centres mean 99 per cent of households are within 10km of a learndirect or UK online centre, 95 per cent are within 5km and 89 per cent within 3km
- There is an existing large and diverse network of **third sector support services for socially excluded groups.** ICT is an enabler to combat social exclusion through such support networks
- Broadband is well established in the UK, and **there are now more households with broadband than dial up Internet connections**
- Directgov – all government services accessible through one website

There are, however, some significant areas of *weakness*:

- Limited **forums/focus on good practice**, so that existing good practice is rarely replicated by service providers
- Low levels of **evaluation evidence**, of assessments of scalability and assessments of economic/social benefit
- Lack of **“thin” hardware** available to excluded with low incomes*
- Lack of **appropriate and/or accessible web content** to engage excluded groups
- e-Government locally is **driven by IT experts**, not service managers and Service managers are often **e-phobic**
- Lack of ownership of the **digital inclusion agenda** within government
- **Third sector providers** lack ICT expertise and funding
- Few web forums and little open access software **to support third sector**
- Government **silos cultures** (local and central) resist ICT enabled cross agency working
- Lack of (public and private) **cross subsidy** arrangements to support e-excluded
- **Take up and use of e-government services is low** – particularly among excluded groups
- **Poor marketing of e-government**, and consequently, awareness is low

* Thin client network systems are simplified computers that are permanently linked by broadband to ‘fat’ servers which provide the actual computer processing power. Users of thin client hardware avoid the expense of investing in computer functions they do not need or use, while securely and cheaply accessing applications such as word processing, email and surfing the Web, without owning the terminals.

There are major *opportunities* to be grasped:

- **Bottom up new services** driven by excluded people can transform lives
- The e-excluded are a **new market at the “bottom of the pyramid”**
- Major efficiencies through ICT by cutting down administration and duplication of effort
- Already have **99 per cent broadband coverage**
- ICT provides **new access channels** to access services, information and opportunities (e.g. Internet, digital TV, mobile phones, SMS text, etc.); and **the digital switchover** provides additional opportunity
- **Soham and Climbié** cases have increased public acceptance of ICT sharing
- A **“one stop”** approach to assessing multiple needs is of particular importance to excluded groups and can be enabled by ICT
- **Personalised and multi agency working** can be enabled by data sharing
- **Customer service management** supported by ICT can deliver major improvements for all including excluded groups
- **Policy planning and evaluation** be enhanced by ICT
- ICT can help to **overcome stigma** in claiming or accessing particular services or benefits (e.g. the use of smart cards to claim free school meals)
- Technology such as telecare can **maintain people’s independence**
- ICT can **support practitioners** with better access to information, mobile working and directly complement human effort (e.g. telecare)
- Evidence suggests that **digitally connected excluded groups are empowered** to make better use of services than those unconnected
- The *Digital Strategy and Transformational Government* set out key **actions to improve service delivery and tackle social exclusion and the digital divide**

But there are also *threats* to progress which we should identify:

- The **drive for e-Government** and the wider development of the e-society may **increase** social exclusion for those unconnected
- Digitally excluded groups **remain indifferent** or hostile to digital engagement
- **Fear of “big brother”** data sharing driven by digitally included affluent groups undermines progress in service improvements for excluded groups
- Fraud or identity theft incidents could lead to **public resistance** to e-driven solutions
- **ICT developers perceive no market** in products to address excluded clients (low cost hardware, low cost broadband services)
- ICT is **too complex and fast moving** for government to keep up – some previous high profile government ICT projects have failed
- Many viable ICT developments are **bottom up and unexpected** and the **risks** associated with implementing large ICT projects can be challenging
- Local and central government sees or finds **no business case** to develop ICT supported services for excluded groups
- Lack of co-ordinated development of **protocols/standards** leading to inefficient and ineffective development of exclusion focused products
- Lack of **evaluation/good** practice leads to wasted investment in poor value projects
- Technical, legal, or cultural difficulties make **true “one stop” services** (where multiple benefits/outcomes are updated by one action) undeliverable
- **Third sector** service providers fail to deliver integrated services to excluded groups due to lack funds or appropriate products
- **ICT could be viewed as a panacea** for social inclusion – **it is not**. ICT is an enabler and people’s primary needs should continue to be addressed

ANNEX B

Acknowledgements

Age Concern
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Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council
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Darlington Borough Council
Demos
Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council
East Serve
Epping Forest District Council
Esprit Limite
Fairbridge
Foyer Federation
Greater London Authority
Groundwork, Thames Valley
Help the Aged
Intelligence Agency
Improvement and Development Agency
International Electronic Commerce
Research Centre
Institute of Public Policy Research
IT For Charities
Julia Schofield Consultants Limited
Lasa (London Advice Service Alliance)
Leicestershire County Council
London Borough of Newham
London Connects
Local Government Association
Mega Nexus
Microsoft
MORI Social Research Institute
National Association of Councils for
Voluntary Service
National Council for Voluntary Organisations
NOP Social & Political
Resource Information Service
Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
RSe Consulting
Ryogens
St Helens MBC
Somerset County Council
Sunderland County Council
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Chapter 6

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- ¹⁴ For example, Hairnet (see: <http://www.hairnet.org/>), or Circuitriders (see: <http://www.lasa.org.uk/circuitriders/>)

Improving Services, Improving Lives

The Social Exclusion Unit's work programme, *Improving Services Improving Lives*, consists of five integrated projects that focus on a number of key groups and issues. **Its overall objective is to make public services more effective for disadvantaged people, in order to improve their life chances.**

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