

HWG/13/1

NOTE OF THE THIRTEENTH MEETING OF THE HORIZON WORKING GROUP HELD ON WEDNESDAY 13 DECEMBER AT 11.30 AT THE DTI CONFERENCE CENTRE, 1 VICTORIA STREET, LONDON

Those present:

DTI

Mike Whitehead	Postal Services Directorate
Hugh Rawson	Postal Services Directorate
Mary Spoor	Postal Services Directorate

DETR

Lord Whitty	Information Minister
Andrew Hebden	PS/Lord Whitty
Jenni Borg	Head e-Business Strategy Unit

Post Office

Stuart Sweetman	Group Managing Director Customer and Banking Services
Dave Miller	Managing Director Post Office Networks
Dave Waltho	Government Gateway Director

CWU

Derek Hodgson	General Secretary
Tony Kearns	Assistant Secretary
Matthew Payton	Research Assistant

CMA

Tony Harris	Assistant National Secretary
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NFSP

Colin Baker	General Secretary
John Peberdy	Chairman Negotiating Committee

Chairman's Introduction

Mike Whitehead welcomed Lord Whitty and his team to the Working Group. A pressing matter prevented Mr Johnson, at short notice, from chairing the meeting. Apologies for absence had been received from Mr McCartney and Terry Deegan.

DETR presentation on electronic delivery of services

DETR e-business strategy took account not only of the central functions of the Department but also the work of nine Agencies, nine Government Offices reporting jointly to DETR and Cabinet Office, 25 Non Departmental Public Bodies and local government. As well as an Information Minister, a senior official within DETR carried responsibility as the e-Champion. Essentially each business unit and each directorate was responsible for developing and pursuing its own business strategy within the overall Departmental vision of working closely and interactively with partners, in both the public and private sectors, to address common issues and to transform delivery of services to individuals and businesses by 2005.

Information was to be made available through the Internet and associated delivery channels and easily located via the DETR website, the UK Online Government portal or public and private sector partners' websites. It was also

planned to deliver online transactional services. An example of one of these projects was Transport Direct which would provide electronically travel information, road reports and ticket purchasing. DETR's internal administration would also be adapting more to electronic working including its use in record keeping and e-procurement.

Local government was also addressing the challenge of the Information Age. Although authorities could not abandon the traditional methods of doing business, many had recognised that there was a need to move forward and support e-business as a delivery channel for the future. Some local authorities were therefore starting to develop their own e-business strategy in advance of a high level approach which DETR aimed to publish in March 2001. To assist the overall process, the Local Government Association, working closely with DETR, had formulated a set of guidelines for their members in order to achieve by 2005:

- Services available outside normal working hours;
- Free Internet access to citizens;
- Multi channel delivery of services;
- Co-ordination around key life episodes;
- Overcoming of difficulties associated with security of personal information;
- Use of smartcards for payments such as for transport, school meals etc;
- Online voting and voter registration;
- Transfer of call centres to multi-agency centres set up in public/private partnerships to provide added value of help and advice;
- Councillors learn on-line equipment;
- Use of e-communication for public consultation;
- Staff benefits such as flexi-working, home working.

Hilary Armstrong, the DETR Minister for Local Government and Housing, would be announcing on 13 December the funding mechanism to distribute Spending Review allocation of £350 million over three years. Funding of £25 million for the first year, 2001/02, was to be used by pathfinder local authorities undertaking specific work which would concentrate on developing partnerships with local businesses and organisations. The results would be broadcast to other councils. As emphasis was being placed on local authorities establishing partnerships, this was a possible area for co-operation with the Post Office.

Partnership between DETR and the Post Office was already in place centring on business conducted by the DVLA. This relationship was moving forward to encompass a pilot study for vehicle relicensing over the Internet and telephone. The launch was scheduled for April 2001 and would be restricted to Motability vehicles at the beginning. DVLA also planned that the vehicle licence renewal form would be barcoded to facilitate relicensing. If this proposal was taken forward it should be possible for Horizon scanning equipment to read and process these forms.

Lord Whitty foresaw opportunities for further collaboration with the Post Office in regard to delivery of services involving face to face contact and verification with the public or to provide a trusted human interface with electronic services. The unique reach of the network could allow post offices to provide local authority services which would be a welcome additional amenity particularly in isolated areas both rural and urban.

(The text of Lord Whitty's presentation is attached to this note)

Questions and Discussion

Stuart Sweetman said that the presentation indicated the potential for many opportunities to be exploited in working with the DETR and local government and certainly, the Post Office wished to and was ready to compete for this work. Following the recent announcement of the pilot project to test the Government GP scheme, the Post Office was keen to ensure that opportunities were provided for their customers to have access to the Internet so that no one should be excluded from the new technology. The Horizon computer programme was on course for completion by Spring 2001. The system was smartcard enabled and it was expected that projects would be launched to pilot use of cards. Currently, the Post Office was piloting a scheme in Manchester to electronically recharge transport cards, if successful there was enormous potential for this business particularly in towns and cities. Assistance was also being sought from NACAB to train Subpostmasters in dispensing information.

Lord Whitty said he was interested to learn about the Government GP scheme. News about the pilot was encouraging and there should be opportunities for co-operation between the Post Office and local authorities. Local authorities throughout the country were being required to rationalise so there was a possibility, in view of the extensive reach of the network for the Post Office, to provide additional outlets on the ground. One other possibility, which he would raise in DETR was to combine pathfinder funding with support available to the Post Office for the Government GP pilot in Leicestershire. It was most important however, to share information and so avoid organisations duplicating and reinventing initiatives.

ACTION:DETR

Mr Sweetman said that he would arrange for the Post Office to make a presentation to the Minister on its plans.

ACTION: POST OFFICE

Horizon roll out update

Dave Miller said that 15,280 post offices had been converted. The target had been 15,000, so the project was one week ahead of schedule. Currently the installation project had stopped for the Christmas break and was due to

resume in mid January. The programme was on schedule for completion by the end of March 2001, with a few exceptions.

Remote fitting of a new software release, CSR Plus, was expected by the end of December.

PIU implementation update

a) Universal Banking Services

Mike Whitehead said that discussions continued with the banks.

In view of the Working Group having been informed that signature to an MOU between Government and the banks was expected in early December, Tony Kearns asked about the progress of these discussions. Stuart Sweetman said there had been some slippage of the original timetable because it had taken longer than envisaged for the BBA to come forward with consensus amongst its members. However, it was expected that difficulties would be resolved by the end of the year. Currently the slippage did not compromise the overall project timetable.

b) Government GP

Mike Whitehead said that a contract between Government and the Post Office had been signed on 30 November. As a result, up to £15 million was being made available to support a pilot project in Leicestershire due to begin in the early Summer.

Mr Johnson had accepted the Secretary of State's invitation to take on the role of Champion Minister for the project. The Minister envisaged that he would take forward the work assisted by an inter Departmental Group of officials which he would chair.

Dave Waltho said that he hoped that the pilot project would begin in June. Currently the project was progressing well and so far the Post Office had assembled a team of 30 people and there remained one or two posts yet to be filled. It was important that a successful outcome for the project should not be jeopardised in the early stages by hasty preparation.

Any other business

Stuart Sweetman said that the Post Office had recently met DSS at a regular strategic partner meeting. DSS plans for ACT migration had progressed since November 1999 which was the last occasion on which the Working Group was updated on this issue. DSS was willing to report back to the meeting and so Mr Sweetman proposed that they be invited to do so.

ACTION: DTI

The Post Office had recently signed to provide a new bill payment scheme with Scottish Power. Mr Sweetman said that Post Office Network planned to promote this service aggressively in the New Year as product of the month in

January to establish customer loyalty. The Scottish Power group comprised Manweb and Southern Water and as these companies supplied one in five UK homes there was potential capture of 35 million transactions for the Post Office. A timescale of six months was open to the Post Office to profit from this opportunity before Scottish Power also signed a second payment scheme deal with PayPoint.

Date of the next meeting

To be arranged.

CGBPS1A
20 December 2000