socitm
insight

Better connected 2006

A snapshot of all local authority websites

February 2006

Acknowledgements

The project team

Contents

This is the eighth annual survey of all local authority websites (plus others belonging to Socitm *Insight* subscribers in the public sector). In total, 543 websites have been examined. The main survey carried out by a team of reviewers used a structured survey with 97 questions for local authority websites aimed at checking how well each website deals with specific points. This has been supplemented by nine other separate surveys, using our partner organisations. The structure of this report follows the criteria for high quality local authority websites defined in the publication entitled *Better connected: aiming high* (December 2005). The criteria develop the ideas that websites should be 'useful, usable and used' (Version 2 of that framework).

The report combines the old with the new. In order to provide year on year continuity we have retained the overall structure and many of the detailed features. We have, however, added some new features reflecting the changing world of the internet and the way in which local authority websites are developing.

We set out the purpose of this survey, the process by which websites are assessed, and the criteria that we apply (the 'useful, usable and used' framework). We then summarise the changing policy context which marks the start of a new era in the development of websites.

The first part of the results looks at the national picture in terms of overall rankings and improvement trends, and includes our lists of transactional sites, our Top 20 and other groupings of top local authorities.

We describe the detailed analysis of the results, focusing firstly on content. We report here on three scenarios of typical visitors for information content, and then examine other aspects of content such as currency of information, use of links, provision of services, response to e-mail and the practice of participation.

The second stage of the results focuses on ease of use. This covers ease of finding, use of navigational aids such as A to Z lists, search engines and locational data, general navigation, design of transactions, accessibility, readability and, finally, technical resilience.

Our third perspective is focused on usage. Switching from the product to the customer, we examine different aspects of the demand side, highlighting trends about usage. We provide the latest information about internet access, visitor usage, satisfaction and behaviour, culminating with advice about better promotion.

We also analyse the results from two additional perspectives. Firstly, we examine the extent to which the policy on priority services has been achieved in England. Secondly, we examine the evidence of true joined-up working, especially in two-tier parts of England.

We consider the impact of the transformation agenda on the pivotal role of the website and the need to integrate it in all aspects of service delivery. The national campaign on take-up planned for 2006 will also present some more pressing issues about both promotion and usability.

Detailed contents

Highlights

Overview of results

- The number of transactional sites has increased from 38 in 2005 to 60 in 2006, the largest increase yet recorded. This includes five new transactional sites for each type of council in England (but only one metropolitan district). There are two new transactional sites in Scotland, but none in Wales or Northern Ireland.

- Our ranking system has four stages. Below the transactional ranking, there has been much less change than the steady 30% improvement in rankings recorded in the past three years. Promotional sites have almost disappeared, but the number of content sites has dropped by only 11, with many slipping back from content plus.

- Looking back over the eight years of this survey, we can see many positive achievements. For example, 75% of council websites in England are now rated as 'content plus' and 42% of websites in London are now transactional.

- Comparison with the latest CPA results in England shows little correlation between the state of websites and the overall council performance, now indicated by the star system from the revised CPA regime. However, when compared with the direction of travel statement, the state of the website is a good barometer of improvement.

Useful content

- The rate of improvement has slowed down in other ways. This year the number of 'Yes' answers to a sample of 14 questions in our survey repeated from last year has increased by 18%, compared with 37% and 31% in the previous two years.

- The response to our sample e-mail improved from last year's test (60% from 47%). We rated 80% of those replies as satisfactory or very good.

Usability

- In the second year of testing the state of A to Z lists of services, we rated 70% as satisfactory or very good, an improvement over last year's disappointing results.

- We repeated our test of internal search engines conducted by SciVisum two years ago and found significant improvements, although many sites still have much to do. Only 10% of councils found four of the most common terms that any council website should be able to handle. If we combine the results of the two tests, just four councils passed both with flying colours.

- The results of accessibility testing are very disappointing. Only 62 councils have achieved Level A conformance with the (Web Accessibility Initiative) WAI guidelines for website accessibility (exactly the same as last year), although three have now also reached Level AA.

- The number of technical errors according to the SiteMorse tests has dropped by a further 40% this year.

Usage

- According to Ipsos MORI, 61% of the GB adult population now uses the internet (compared with 55% last year).

- Our estimates based on the Socitm *Insight* website take-up service show that over 10.2m people may have visited local authority websites in December. A sample of 19 sites indicates a 40% increase in visitor numbers over 12 months.

- Our website take-up service also shows over 2005 a 5% improvement in the right information being found. Overall, 84% now say they will return to the website compared with 7% who say they will not.

Supporting analyses

- Our desktop analysis against a sample of 30% of the priority outcomes for councils in England suggests that good progress has been made from a low base twelve months ago. However, the overall evidence from our survey is that most councils appear to be struggling in a number of priority areas.

- We also analyse the joining-up of government in areas in England and find that generally councils are not at all well advanced in sharing information. Although a few county areas show up very well, there is much to do, especially where county-based portals have been introduced.

The future

- The transformation agenda that has developed over the past 12 months re-inforces the need for the website to become an integral part of service delivery across every service. The national take-up campaign in 2006 also highlights the importance of marketing e-services. Some evidence suggests that this may not need to be expensive, but requires a re-focusing of approaches to be much more centred on the customer and citizen.

How did your council do?

The purpose of this report is to identify good practice in the development of local authority websites based on extensive evidence-based research. The report is supported by detailed information relating to individual councils, which is available to Socitm *Insight* subscribers in the subscriber-only area of www.socitm.gov.uk. The information comprises spreadsheets, reports, presentations and electronic versions of all printed material:

How did your organisation do?
We have also assessed other public sector websites belonging to another 75 organisations subscribing to Socitm *Insight*. The detailed results of all those surveys are found in an adjacent area of the contents of the subscriber-only area of www.socitm.gov.uk.

Spreadsheets
- A **summary of the results of the main survey**, together with the separate **news value** and **discussion forums tests** and a more detailed set of results from the **e-mail test**.

- An **index of council references** contains all references to examples of good practice, entries in the lists of top sites etc, so that subscribers have a quick reference to their council (or other councils). **Over 50% of councils are listed as having examples of good practice**.

- A **summary of the accessibility results** brings together all the detailed information about the accessibility assessments produced from the three stages of the testing process, using respectively the Socitm review team, automated testing software and **RNIB expertise**, and highlighting those that have passed or failed the Level A and Level AA standards (and the reasons why).

- A **summary of SiteMorse results** brings together all the detailed information about the technical performance of each council using all the results we have obtained from the SiteMorse product, and highlighting the results indicated in the report as good or bad.

- A **summary of SciVisum results** brings together all the detailed information about the search engine tests provided by **SciVisum** and highlighting the results indicated in the report as good or bad.

- A **summary of Hitwise results** brings together all the detailed information about website visits for each council as a percentage of the local government market.

- A **list of content management systems** in use in all but 6% of local authorities (exc Northern Ireland)

In addition to these spreadsheets, which list the results for all councils, there is one supporting set of data that contains the result of a more selective survey of councils:

- The **Emphasis Training results** lists the full details of information from a sample of 73 councils that analyse the readability of websites using an automated tool.

Presentation
- A presentation in five parts summarises **all the key messages** from the whole report and can be tailored for in-house presentations.

Electronic versions
A 'pdf' version is available of the **full report** and the **executive briefing**.

Note:
The electronic version of the full report contains Appendices 5 to 15 forming a technical supplement that is not available in the printed version of the report that contains just Appendices 1 to 4.

Foreword

Thank you for taking an interest in *Better connected 2006*.

I am truly glad that more and more of us who are closely involved in the delivery of local government services are realising that ICT offers the best opportunity for us to rethink the way in which we communicate with our customers and deliver essential services to them.

Our websites need to be as transactional as today's technology will allow them to be. Our customers can deal with their banks and other institutions online at 4.00 am if they choose! They find it strange that in some areas of the country their local councils don't allow them the same freedom. Not to take advantage of the solutions that technology offers us is simply reckless. Yes, more reckless than being adventurous!

The paths are getting evermore well trodden. Helpful organisations such as Socitm list examples of best practice for us all to share in and to learn from. So come on in! The water's fine! Your customers expect it. Don't let them down.

Councillor Paul Bettison
e-government champion (LGA)
and leader of Bracknell Forest Council

Preface

This is our eighth annual survey of local authority websites across the UK. It examines in depth their state of development at the end of 2005, the year when all government transactions that were capable of being offered online should have been made available. In England, 2005 was also the year for achieving the required priority service outcomes.

Have local authority websites cleared these targets? To find out the answer, we have examined every UK local authority website and judged them against our standard for high quality websites of being 'useful, usable and used'. We have also examined many other issues such as the joining up of government and the need to promote usage of the facilities that are now available.

Local authority websites have to serve a diverse range of customers with diverse needs for information and services. Our report is essential in identifying and sharing good practice for policymakers, managers and practitioners alike.

Part A
Today's context

We set out the purpose of this survey, the process by which websites are assessed, and the criteria that we apply (the 'useful, usable and used' framework). We then summarise the changing policy context which marks the start of a new era in the development of websites.

1   Introduction

1.1   The importance of the local authority website

We have been tracking local authority websites now for eight years. They are critical to the improvement of services and communications with citizens, customers and local communities. Government funding has certainly stimulated their development, but that only reflects the radical changes in society and lifestyle that the internet has made possible. Over 60% of the population now use the internet at home or at work, and many of those also use it via contact centres to support the ones who do not.

Ours is a unique, systematic and comprehensive survey of websites in local government. Feedback continues to indicate that the survey plays an increasingly important role in identifying and promoting good practice in a dynamic but challenging environment, characterised by a wide diversity of customers and services.

1.2   The focus of the survey

Our approach

We set out to provide an informed view of the quality of the experience that members of the public are likely to have when engaging with local government through a website. We do this by examining how well each site deals with common queries and situations. The results are based on what we actually found during November and December 2005, not on aspirations or good intentions.

Our main survey is based on a number of scenarios and themes carefully selected to give a rounded view of each website. We vary the questions each year, although we do repeat some from the previous year in order to make valid year-on-year comparisons.

In searching for answers to the questions in our survey, we learn how easy it is to use each website. However, while independent, our reviewers are very experienced in finding their way around local authority websites. They do not necessarily behave like casual visitors who may not know their way around government websites at all. Although we aim to act as everyday visitors, in practice our reviewers will actually be much more tolerant of errors and navigational difficulties than the general public might be.

This forms the major part of our research, but we have supplemented it with a number of other surveys, commissioned from third parties, which focus on particular issues that our team cannot cover.

Finally, we need to remind readers that we are investigating what we see in front of us as a service being offered. In general, we do not consider information from inside an organisation, because we are assessing the direct evidence available to the website visitor anywhere in the world. Our assessment concerns the state of development of the websites, but it does not explore how well integrated they are with back-office functions or how effective they are when they are used for real-life transactions.

What's new?

In the rapidly changing world of the internet, we set out to provide continuity of assessment year on year so that website managers and others who set store by our report have some stability in developing their improvement plans for their websites. However, it is also important that we add new features to our survey in order to reflect the changing world. Here are the main new features in this year's report (listed in order of appearance).

New feature	Section
Survey of the **new Licensing Act 2003** handled by council websites	4.1
Examination of all **discussion forums** in use by councils	4.9
Comparison of tests of **search engine facilities** with **results from search engines**	5.4
Systematic assessment of use of **interactive mapping** by local authority websites, including advice on accessibility of GIS	5.5
Additional features on accessibility assessment, including analysis of claims made against results achieved	5.7
Analysis of sample tests on **vulnerability to security attack**	5.9
First **comparison over 12 months of key visitor statistics** on usage and satisfaction	6.3 and 6.4
First analysis of **county-based portals** from perspective of council website	8.5

1.3   The process of the main survey

We conducted our main survey during the period 15 November 2005 to 23 December 2005.

Readers should understand how we have carried out the investigation:

- Website addresses are based on information from last year's survey, unless we have been advised differently by the local authority in question (The list of addresses we have used are contained in *How did your council do?*, the subscriber-only area of www.socitm.gov.uk)

- Any site may have changed since our review period.

- Website assessments are not an exact science, however much we try to be analytical and objective. There is bound to be an element of subjective opinion and impression.

- We do not attempt to explore every part of the website, but focus on survey questions that we think members of the public are likely to ask.

- The way that websites are linked together sometimes makes it hard to assess sites in isolation.

Website teams should remember that failure to find information reflects on the usability of the website design as much as on our investigation.

Three additional surveys were carried out by individual members of the team outside the main survey:

- Evidence of news value (January 2006)

- Responses to sample e-mail (October and November 2005)

- Discussion forums (January 2006)

This report is now extremely well read and used. In recognition of our commitment to ensuring its relevance, quality and accuracy, we follow a quality assurance process for all stages of the project, including:

- Planning the main survey

- Piloting the main survey

- Carrying out the main survey

- Working with third parties

- Producing the report

1.4 Other sources of information

Our main source of evidence remains the survey carried out by our team of reviewers, but there are a number of other useful sources of information used by the team. Listed in the order of use in this report, these sources comprise the following:

	Supplier	Description of survey	Coverage of sites	Section(s) of report
1	SiteMorse	Benchmarking of various technical measures	All	Sections 4.5, 5.1, 5.6 and 5.9
2	SciVisum	Testing of search engine facilities	All	Section 5.4
3	RNIB	Website accessibility	All	Section 5.7
4	Emphasis Training	Website readability	73 sites	Section 5.8
5	Hytec	Website security	20 sites	Section 5.9
6	Ipsos MORI	Access to the internet	N/a	Section 6.1
7	Hitwise	Usage of websites	All	Section 6.2
8	Nielsen// NetRatings	Visitor feedback on websites	50 sites	Section 6.3
9	speed-trap	Technical assessment of website usage	5 sites	Section 6.4

Generally, only the summary and key messages from these surveys are found in the body of the report. The results are not used for the overall ranking of sites, although some may have a small influence in the selection of our Top 20 sites. The appendices contain some supporting detail about many of the surveys (eg methodologies used), but in most cases the detail will only be found in **How did your council do?**, the subscriber-only area of www.socitm.gov.uk.

1.5 'Useful, usable and used'

Getting the content right and making the website easy to use are vital for building the long-term relationship with website visitors that will sustain their participation and involvement.

The *Better connected* reports have always stressed that what matters for users of local authority websites is whether they can find the information or service they are looking for with the minimum of effort. This seems to be a simple objective, but, of course, in practice is much more complicated because local authorities are complex organisations providing hundreds of services to a large number of quite different audiences. In addition to providing services, they have a unique role as instruments of local democracy, community leaders and law and regulation enforcers within a defined geographical area.

Those developing, supporting and managing websites have to cope with this diversity in a rapidly changing technological and social environment.

In December 2005, we published a special report in the *Better connected* series entitled *Better connected: aiming high*. This contained Version 2 of the framework of criteria by which we assess local authority websites — the framework for 'useful, usable and used' websites.
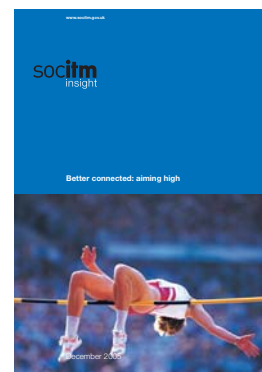
Useful content	**Does the website have the information that people are looking for?**	**Usability**	**How easy is the information to find and use on the website?**
A website must conform with all these criteria to ensure that the content is useful.		**A website must conform with all these criteria to ensure that it is easy to use.**	
Information	Do people find answers to their questions?	Ease of finding	Can people find the site easily?
Currency	Can people rely on the site being up to date?	Use of A to Z list	Can people find their way easily to a specific topic?
Links elsewhere	Are people referred to another organisation if the council does not have the information?	Use of search engine	Does a specific word or phrase generally point people to the information they want?
News value	Does the content capture people's attention by its newsworthiness?	Use of location	Can people find information easily by using a map or postcode (or other similar)?
E-mail	Can people do business by e-mail with the council?	Navigation	Can people rely on a clear and consistent style in finding their way around?
Transactions	Can people transact business with the council?	Design of transactions	Can people use online forms and other transactions easily?
Participation	Do people have the opportunity to influence council policies and decisions?	Accessibility	Can people use the site if they have a disability?
		Readability	Can people understand what the site says?
		Resilience	Can people rely on the site to be available and working properly?

Usage — **How well used is the website?**

It is recommended that each organisation pursues policies that will encourage take-up of their websites under these broad headings.

Access	Do people have easy free access to the internet (not forgetting access through intermediaries)?
Measurement	Are visitor numbers and interactions increasing?
Feedback	What do visitors think about their experience in using the site?
Promotion	Are websites being fully marketed to key audiences?

2   National policies and direction

2.1   End of an era… start of another

So much energy has been focused on achieving government targets for availability of online services, that one might be forgiven for heaving a sigh of relief when looking back on 2005 and ahead to 2006. The reality is that what we called the local e-government programme has for some time slipped away into the efficiency agenda and now in recent months the transformational agenda.

In England the **priority services** policy formally launched in June 2004 is very much alive for most councils. This report will show to what extent the required outcomes (due 31 December 2005) and the good outcomes (due 31 March 2006) have been achieved. They have not, however, disappeared, because they have been taken into the revised Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) regime. Evidence of their achievement will be required for CPA inspections.

Another clear indicator of changing times is the drying up of **funding from the Local Government Online (LGOL)** programme in England. Outside England the funding support has been different and less substantial, reflected in generally less advanced council websites. The money from Implementing Electronic Government (IEG) returns appears to be over, as do funds for almost all the large numbers of national projects. 2005 saw many decisions being taken about the future of these projects.

One area of the programme that is very much alive is all the work being done last year, and to be completed this year, in **boosting take-up**. Currently, a major campaign is being planned. Much work is also being carried out on the Local Directgov project, which reached a major milestone in January 2006 in joining up the Directgov portal with local government.

Outside LGOL itself, other parts of government have been influencing the growing issue of **inaccessible websites**. New research, new legislation and new guidelines have all contributed to heightening the importance of this issue.

Without doubt the biggest influence on policy from the Government has been the publication in November 2005 of *Transformational government — enabled by technology* from the Cabinet Office e-Government Unit. **Transforming public services** is likely to have as much of an influence, if not a greater one, on website developments than the original local e-government programme.

All these policy developments will influence the context in which those delivering local public services are now developing and managing their websites. Each is described in more detail in the rest of this section.

2.2   Priority outcomes (England)

Launched in June 2004, this policy has shaped the way in which local authority websites have developed in 2005. It defines 14 priority outcomes (10 priority services and 4 transformational outcomes) and three levels of outcome for each service. Many of those outcomes depend on the council website for their implementation. The full list of priority outcomes is given in Section 7.

The first level of outcomes is now at an end. As the second level of outcomes has a target date of 31 March 2006, this part of the policy is theoretically still work-in-progress for almost all local authorities. The third level does not have a specified date attached to it. However, the policy will live on and become part of the new regime for CPA in England. The 'Key Lines of Enquiry for Corporate Assessment' makes an explicit reference under the heading of 'capacity' to the achievement of the required outcomes.

The policy of priority outcomes does not apply to local authorities in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The European dimension

To date the local e-government agenda in the UK has largely followed the framework set out in **eEurope 2005**, the European Commission strategy for making Europe and its citizens competitive players in the information society. The European focus has to date been on broadband infrastructure, public services and addressing market failure.

The new European Action Plan, **i2010**, has three main objectives, all relevant to the next stages of development of e-government in the UK. The first objective, known as Single European Information Space, is concerned with digital convergence, underpinned by a sound broadband infrastructure, and includes content development. The second objective is concerned with research and innovation to close the gap with Europe's competitors. A number of authorities are now working closely in this field with universities and the research arms of private sector companies to take e-government to the next levels. The third objective looks for an inclusive information society, providing high quality public services and promoting quality of life.

Across Europe, e-government developments are taking place in the same timescale as in the UK. There are opportunities for local authorities to enlist support to explore the next stages of e-government, and leading edge solutions can be found in many countries of Europe and beyond. The European Ministerial eGovernment Conference in Manchester in November 2005 demonstrated many practical solutions to issues which UK local authorities are facing now, and many of our own examples of good practice were also given a European stage.

Further information on the **i2010** Action Plan is available: http://europa.eu.int/information_society /eeurope/i2010/index_en.htm

2.3 The take-up campaign

The **e-citizen** national project was one of the last to deliver its findings. In last year's report we were just able to publish an interim executive summary of what was then launched in April 2005. This project reported that "up to 46% of the adult population of England are ready and waiting to use local authority e-channels. There is huge potential, with an untapped market of 17.5 million e-citizens. The research also shows that local authorities in England are in a good position to tap in to this potential and drive take-up of their e-channels. They will be able to achieve this through targeting citizens who already embrace e-commerce and e-communications".

One outcome of this finding is that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) has prepared a major national campaign to promote the local e-government facilities that have been developed over the past five years or so. The campaign is planned to start in March 2006 and marks a major switch of emphasis from improving the service to stimulating the demand for it.

Another closely-linked development is the Local Directgov programme that sprang out of the Directgov website launched in April 2004 in order to strengthen its home and community franchise, which is owned by the ODPM on behalf of local government. One major step forward was taken in January 2006 with the direct link in Directgov to all local authorities whenever Directgov visitors ask for a specific local authority service. This has been implemented so that the national promotional campaign can take visitors to Directgov and then straight to a specific local service without knowledge of the name of the local authority, but merely by the entry of a home or business postcode.

A further contribution from Local Directgov has been detailed advice about the usability of web applications that comes in the form of a CD-ROM with step-by-step guidance relating to twelve major applications. This is the first of a four-volume set about good practice for website usability to be completed in 2006.
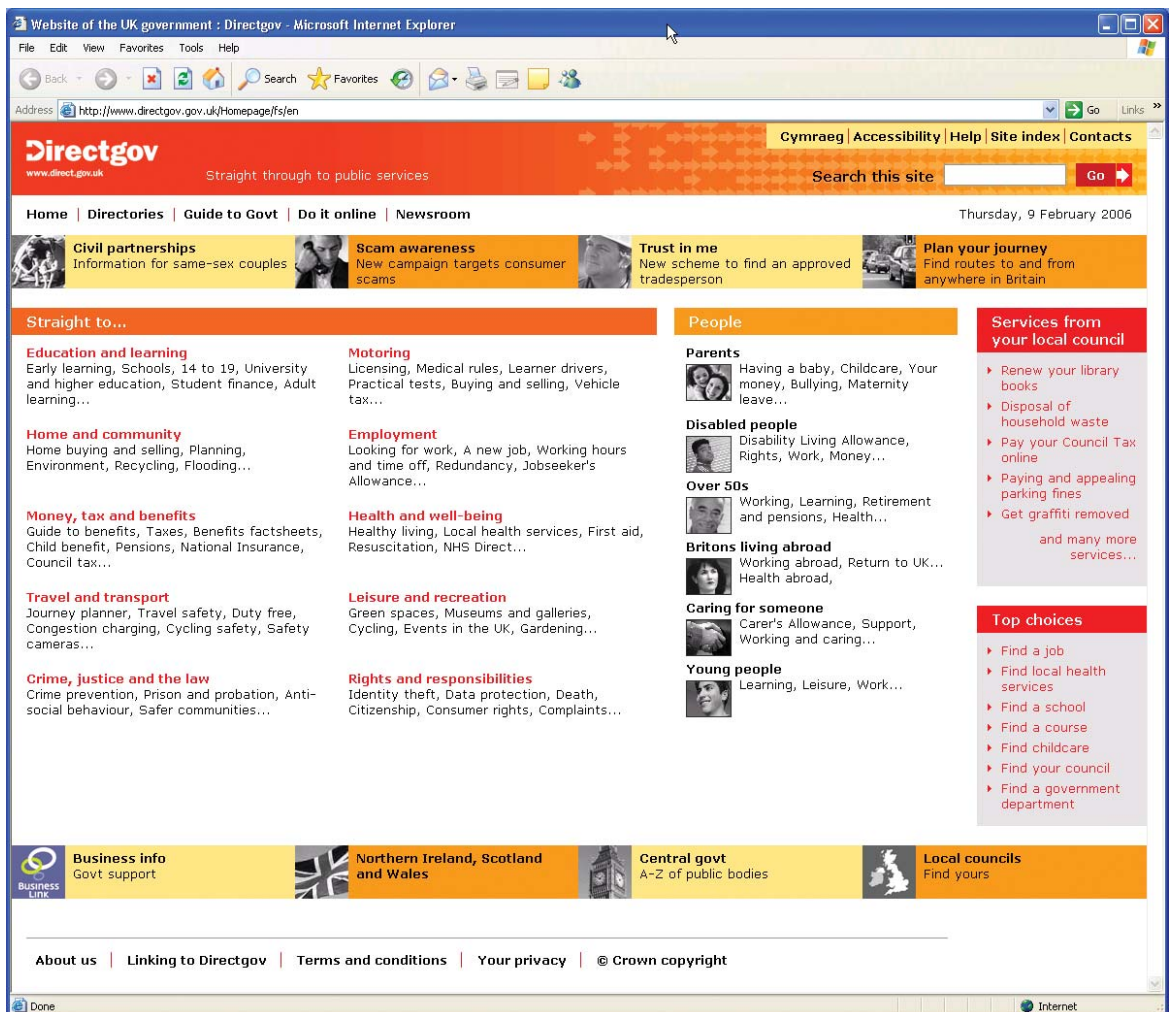
www.direct.gov.uk   9 February 2006

2.4 Accessibility of online public services

Overview

One of the priority service outcomes concerns accessibility of local e-government services. The clear evidence from last year's survey was that local authorities will find it almost impossible to reach Level AA of the WCAG 1.0 guidelines by 31 March 2006. Since that forecast, further evidence has emerged during 2005 about the scale of the task and the importance of tackling it.

The scale of the task was re-inforced by two linked reports, commissioned by the e-Government Unit in 2005 from a partnership led by the RNIB and including Socitm *Insight*. The two publications are:

- *eAccessibility of public sector services in the European Union* (November 2005)

- *eAccessibility of '.gov.uk' services* (planned for March 2006)

Employing the same methodology of mixed automated and manual testing used by the same organisations, the first of those reports found that no more than 3% of government websites across the EU will have achieved Level A conformance and that no more than 4% of government sites across the UK will have achieved it. Although local government performs over 50% better than other parts of the UK public sector, the surveys are a very strong reminder that local public services have a long way to go to make websites accessible to all.

At the same time the legislative framework has been toughened with the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 accompanied by new guidelines becoming available.

Disability Discrimination Act 2005

This expands the original 1995 legislation in a number of ways. For example, the definition of disability was extended, amendments were made to the aspects of the Act covering transport and property, and a new duty was introduced for public bodies in all levels of the public sector.

It introduced the Public Sector Disability Equality Duty (DED), which will come into effect in December 2006. The DED places a duty on the public sector to promote disability equality similar to the way that race equality is promoted under the Race Relations Amendment Act. This duty to ensure equal opportunities for disabled people required public sector bodies to involve disabled people in the development of a disability equality scheme that will outline the ways in which the requirements of the public duty will be met. It is inconceivable that websites and intranets would not be included in this.

The Disability Rights Commission has published two statutory Codes of Practice — one covering England and Wales and a separate one for Scotland. One example illustrated in the Codes of Practices relates to the procurement and maintenance of websites, the use of third-party contractors and the need to ensure that standard terms of contract are revised to reflect that the organisation is meeting its DED.

eAccessibility of public sector services in the European Union

eAccessibility of '.gov.uk' services

Socitm *Insight* has a special interest in these two reports because the e-Government Unit commissioned a partnership led by the RNIB and including Socitm *Insight* into the accessibility of online government services.

The results from both the EU and the more detailed UK report are disappointing. Only a very small number of websites conform with Level A of the W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 1.0). The conclusions are re-produced opposite:

"The findings from the survey are clear. Online public services have a long way to go before they are fully accessible and inclusive. However, this research indicates that policy engagement is linked to the e-accessibility of government services and that rapid improvement is achievable through co-ordinated effort by those who are best placed to effect change — public policy-makers, web managers and developers in public sector organisations and web designers in the software industry. We provide 15 detailed recommendations to be considered by these key stakeholders."

eAccessibility of '.gov.uk' services (planned for March 2006)

2.5 Transforming public services

New guidelines

The criteria used for evaluation of accessible websites are defined in internationally recognised guidelines. The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) produced in May 1999 as part of its Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) Version 1 of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 1.0). Version 2 of WCAG has been drafted and is likely to be released during 2006.

One of the reasons why making websites accessible is such a deep-seated issue is that many designers of websites and suppliers of content management systems are unaware of, and untrained in, accessible websites; this is a problem compounded by much ignorance from those who commission their services. Following on from the references in the Disability Equality Duty described above, the BSI has launched in March 2006 (after much consultation with many bodies) the *Publicly-Available Specification (PAS 78) — Guide to Good Practice in Commissioning Accessible Websites*. For the first time, all organisations, whether buying or selling such services, will have guidelines to help them understand a complex topic.

"Services enabled by ICT must be designed around the citizen or business, not the provider, and provided through modern, co-ordinated delivery channels. This will improve the customer experience, achieve better policy outcomes, reduce paperwork burdens and improve efficiency by reducing duplication and routine processing, leveraging delivery capacity and streamlining processes."

Transformational government — enabled by technology (November 2005)

This strategic document sets out the next stages of development of modern public services in the UK. It identifies three key transformations that must take place if the vision for 21st-century government enabled by technology is to be achieved. The first of those transformations, summarised above, refers to customer-centred services.

With over 80% of all transactions between government and citizens taking place at the local level, it is the local public services that provide the 'shop window' through which most of the public view government, and through which they will notice any transformation of services. For this strategy of *Transformational government* to become a reality, the design of services and the design of the experience of interaction with government must be centred on the customer and driven by the customer — and that transformation must be evident at the place where government and its customers meet at the local level.

In many situations the critical point of interaction will be the local authority website, whether it is a parent submitting an application for a school admission in Hertfordshire, a potential tenant looking for housing in West London, a social worker ordering independent living equipment for old people in Glasgow, or a resident in rural Hampshire booking a local bus into the nearest town. These examples are carefully chosen. In October 2005, Socitm *Insight* collected some 102 case studies of service transformation that included all four examples quoted above. An analysis of the case studies showed that 77% of them depended entirely on web technology and in particular on the council website.

In turn, this will put greater emphasis not just on the facility being available on the website, but on it being easy to use from start to finish, in other words on usability.

Part B

Overview of this year's results

The first part of the results looks at the national picture in terms of overall rankings and improvement trends, and includes our lists of transactional sites, our Top 20 and other groupings of top local authorities.

3 National trends

3.1 Overall state of development

Local authorities

Our main survey covers 97 questions that we put to each local authority website in order to ascertain its state of development (see Appendix 4 for full list of questions). We aim to summarise our assessment for each website in one indicator — the overall ranking. In order to do this we use a four-stage ranking system that we have used ever since our first such survey in 1999:

- P   Promotional site

- C   Content site

- C+   Content plus site

- T   Transactional site

Finally, if a site cannot be reviewed,

- U   Unclassified

Definitions for this ranking system are given in Appendix 2. We have also defined the criteria for assessing sites according to this ranking system. The criteria that we use for ranking sites are reproduced in the body of this report and described in full in our complementary report *Better connected: aiming high* (December 2005).

We also use a number of supplementary surveys in order to support the main surveys. We do not use them to inform our ranking. In exceptional cases (eg very poor technical performance) we might use the results to overrule the assessment from our main survey.
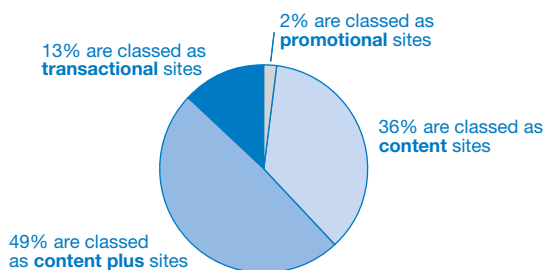
Chart 1 State of development for all local authorities

2% are classed as **promotional** sites
13% are classed as **transactional** sites
36% are classed as **content** sites
49% are classed as **content plus** sites

Out of the 468 local authorities in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, all have websites, although one was not available in the last fortnight of our review period when we planned to review it (described by our survey as unclassified).
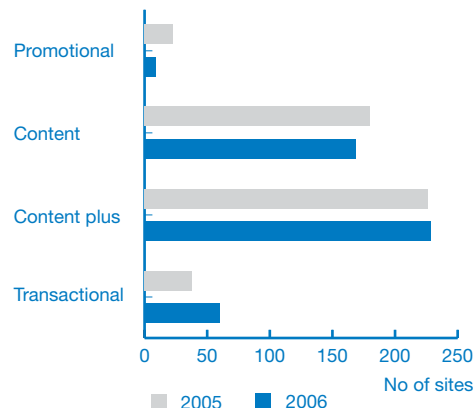
Chart 2 Comparison with last year

2005   2006
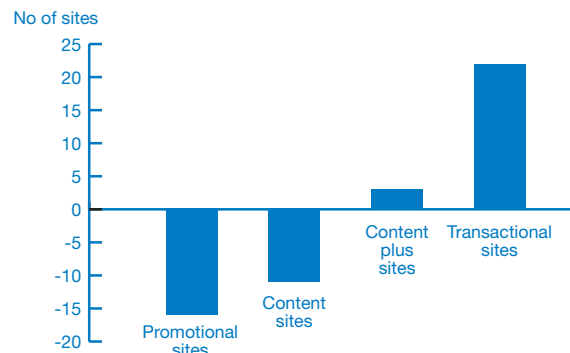
Chart 3 Number of changes in ranking

In overall terms there has been a small drop in the number of content and promotional sites, with a small increase in transactional sites. Chart 4 shows in fact that the previous two years saw a remarkably similar pattern of change, but this year overall the pace of change has slowed down.

Ranking	2004	2005	2006	No change
Promotional	-37	-33	-16	5
Content	-25	-28	-11	79
Content plus	48	49	3	101
Transactional	13	15	22	N/a*
Total				**185**

Chart 4 Changes in site ranking over last three years

* Transactional sites cannot improve themselves in our ranking system. 21 councils have maintained their transactional site ranking in the past three years.

Over the three-year period 185 council sites have not changed their ranking (40% of the total). Many will conclude that overall this is quite a high percentage of council websites that have not apparently progressed. This would, however, ignore many improvements that might have taken place, such as improved search facilities and A to Z lists of services, and might not be reflected in the overall ranking.

The net changes for each ranking conceal much greater change in the rankings for individual councils, as shown in Chart 5 below. There has been a net increase of 69 sites moving up into 'content plus' and a net reduction of 36 sites moving down into 'content'.

Ranking	Going up	Going down	Net
Promotional	1	2	-1
Content	12	48	-36
Content plus	72	3	69
Transactional	25	3	22

Chart 5 Changes in site ranking in last year

Non-local authorities

Using a shorter questionnaire based on the local authority survey, we have also investigated websites from some other organisations that subscribe to Socitm *Insight* as follows:

- Six passenger transport executives (PTEs)

- Eight fire services

- Eight police services

- Sixteen registered social landlords (RSLs)

- Twenty-six central government departments (inc all those represented on the CIO Council)

- Three organisations in the National Health Service (NHS)

- Eight regional or other government organisations

In total we surveyed an additional 75 sites from these related sectors, making, with 468 local authority websites, 543 websites reviewed in total.

In general, most local government websites seem very good in comparison, but we have identified three exceptionally good websites that are transactional to our definition.

The results are summarised in Appendix 3 and detailed in the subscriber-only area of www.socitm.gov.uk.

3.2 Transactional sites

Each year the number of transactional sites attracts the main attention, because it represents the ambition of our ranking system and reflects the government's drive to be fully interactive by 2005.

The total number of transactional sites now stands at 60. A full list is set out in Appendix 2.

The profile of the 60 transactional sites now comprises:

Summary of T sites by type of council					
	2005	Change	2006	Max	%age
Shire counties	6	+5	-2	9	34	26%
Shire districts	9	+7	-1	15	238	6%
London boroughs	9	+5		14	33	42%
Metropolitan districts	7	+1		8	36	22%
English unitaries	5	+5		10	47	21%
Scottish unitaries	1	+2		3	32	9%
Welsh unitaries	1	0		1	22	5%
Total	**38**	**+25**	**-3**	**60**	**442**	**14%**

Chart 6 Summary of transactional sites by type of council

This shows that there are at least five new transactional sites for each type of council in England, except for metropolitan districts which only had a single new one. There are two new transactional sites in Scotland, but none in Wales or Northern Ireland.

Regionally in England, the profile of the 56 transactional sites comprises:

Summary of T sites by region					
	2005	Change	T sites	Max	%age
East of England	2	1		3	54	6%
East Midlands	0	4		4	45	9%
London	9	5		14	33	42%
North East	2	0		2	25	8%
North West	4	4	-1	7	46	15%
South East	8	6	-1	13	74	18%
South West	6	0	-1	5	51	10%
West Midlands	4	2		6	38	16%
Yorkshire & Humber	1	1		2	22	9%
Total	**36**	**23**	**-3**	**56**	**388**	**14%**

Chart 7 Summary of transactional sites by English region

Half the new transactional sites come from London and the South East, with most of the others coming from the West and East Midlands. Overall, the north-eastern and eastern side of England (excluding Kent) have relatively few examples of transactional sites (with the four regions each having less than 10%).

Finally, it is interesting to see the growth of transactional sites since the start of our surveys in 1999.
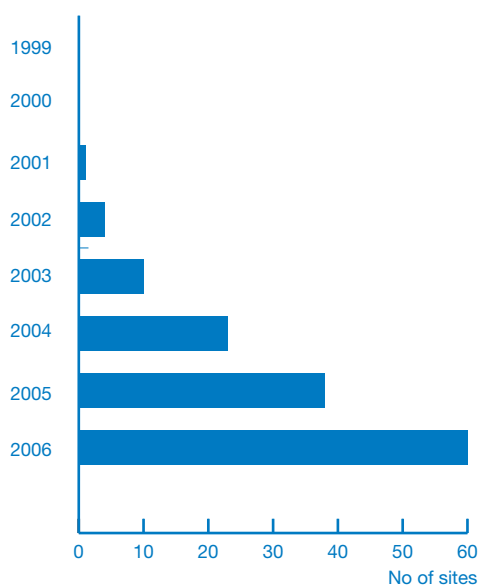
Chart 8 Implementation of transactional sites

The rate of increase has quickened in the past twelve months with a net increase of 22 compared with 13 and 15 in the previous two years. However, many observers would have expected to see a much bigger increase in England at least in the final year of the LGOL programme. It is difficult to explain why this has not been the case, but two points are worth noting:

● There has undoubtedly been an increase in transactions added to council websites, but often this growth has been implemented in a hurry, no doubt because of the deadlines, and usability has been sacrificed. Our reviewers made many comments about the difficulty of finding services, or the lack of integration of third party software for specific applications.

● Building a transactional website, by our definition, is not a simple task. If the underlying design is not right, then adding services to it might make the experience of using it worse rather than better. Alternatively, even if councils recognise the need to re-design their website, this may take a year or two from review to fruition.

The process of assessment
We identified the sites by taking those that have been nominated by the main reviewer to be T sites or, failing such a recommendation, those that pass, or nearly pass:

● **a threshold on questions answered** (33 out of a maximum of 60)

● **a threshold on scenarios and themes** (a rating of an average of two out of three across eleven scenarios and themes)

● **a threshold on transactional questions** (6 out of a maximum of 16).

We also reviewed the list we published in 2005 of those who were not quite transactional last year and included four of the 18 who did not meet the criteria above.

In total, 121 sites were considered at this stage, excluding those transactional sites from 2005 that have retained their ranking. We then asked at least three other reviewers to carry out a shorter assessment before taking all the evidence in making the final judgment as a team verdict.

In particular, some sites came close to our benchmark. We have listed these in Appendix 2 alongside those who have been assessed as transactional.

The introduction in January 2004 of an improved set of criteria for sites achieving T status (via our publication *Better connected: building for the future*) has led to a considerable tightening of the criteria (eg specific targets for accessibility now stated). If all these criteria were applied strictly, then there would be fewer transactional sites. However, it is also important to retain the historical threshold that we have used in the previous seven years of the survey. We have applied the full criteria to qualify the transactional status. The qualifications are listed for all transactional sites and explained in full in Appendix 2.

3.3   Top 20 most developed sites

When one looks at the overall picture, it is natural that the first question many might ask about the survey is 'which are the best sites?'. We can answer this by assessing the state of development, but the scope of the survey does not then allow us to say which are best used or valued by the visitors who access the sites.

Each year we have identified the Top 20 of the best-developed websites in order to provide a broad benchmark to the local government community and others about where they might look for good practice. This year we have updated our Top 20 websites.

The criteria we have applied in selecting this year's Top 20 relate directly to our survey. Each transactional site has been assessed according to three weightings that add up to an overall score of 100 points:

● A score for the number of 'Yes' answers to our questions (out of 60) – weighting of 40 points

● A score for the overall ratings the eleven scenarios and themes (out of 33) – weighting of 40 points

● A score for the number of qualifications avoided (see Appendix 2 for details) – weighting of 20 points

There is a fine line between some that have been included and many more that have been excluded. To get a fuller picture of a benchmark of the best, we have listed the best for each type of authority in Section 3.5. In terms of state of development, most councils included in these lists are near to the ones in the overall Top 20 (excluding those in Northern Ireland for which we lowered the benchmark).

**Further information: See Appendix 1 for summary of results
See Appendix 2 for details of transactional sites**

If subscriber, visit *How did your council do?*, the subscriber-only area of www.socitm.gov.uk

Socitm *Insight* Top 20

● Brent

● Brighton & Hove

● Camden

● Clackmannanshire   (New)

● Corporation of London

● East Sussex CC   (New)

● Havering   (New)

● Kensington & Chelsea

● Kirklees MBC

● Isle of Wight

● Lambeth   (New)

● Leicester City   (New)

● Milton Keynes   (New)

● Borough of Poole   (New)

● Shrewsbury & Atcham BC

● Surrey CC

● Surrey Heath BC

● Wandsworth

● Westminster

● Wrexham CBC

Seven out of the 20 listed here did not appear in last year's list, or the previous year's list.

3.4 Profile by Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA)

It is also natural to ask 'Does the state of the website reflect the overall performance of the council?'

The results from the latest round of CPA assessments in all councils in England, except shire districts, were published in December 2005.These were based on the tougher regime for CPA (CPA — *the harder test*). The new framework consists of a star rating (one to four stars) and a statement of direction (four categories of 'improving strongly, improving well, improving adequately, not improving').

The recent set of results enables us to update the correlation between a council's CPA result and the state of its website. If we compare the website ranking with the numbers of stars awarded, there is in fact very little correlation. However, if we compare the statement of direction, there is some correlation as shown in the chart below.
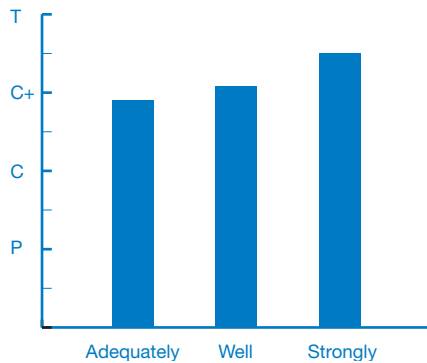
Chart 9 Website rankings compared with direction of travel (CPA)

As two-thirds of the councils fall in the middle category (improving well), this chart shows that the state of the website is a barometer of improvement for the two groups at either side of the majority in the middle. It reflects how strongly or otherwise the council is performing. We cannot demonstrate that the website contributes to council improvement, rather than just reflects it, but an improving website should be a test of corporate management, and perhaps an indicator of a positive working culture.

3.5 Profile of improvement

A historical perspective

As we have mentioned earlier, the year of 2005 was a landmark year when all government transactions that were capable of being offered online should have been made available, and in England when all the required priority outcomes should have been achieved. This makes it an appropriate time to do a retrospective analysis of the achievement since 1999 when our surveys of local authority websites started.

All councils	1999	2006	% age change
No sites	127	0	
P sites	213	9	-95%
C sites	103	169	+60%
C+ sites	24	229	+850%
T sites	0	60	
U sites	1	1	
Total	468	468	

Chart 10a A historical perspective

Here we can see that eight years ago:

- 27% of local authorities had no website, a situation that disappeared in 2003

- 45% had promotional sites, a rating that has now almost disappeared

- Only 5% had content plus sites compared with 49% now

- None had transactional sites, but now 13% do

We can also see how these patterns are reflected by type of council.
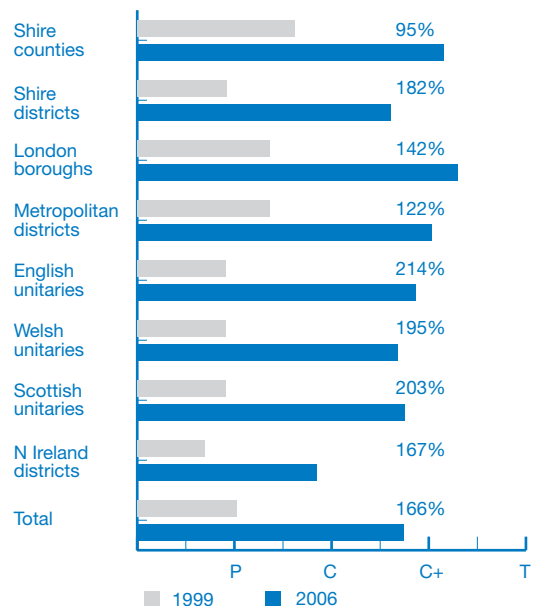
Chart 10b A historical perspective (by type of council)

Most improved sites

As in previous years we have been able to identify those sites that have made a big leap forward. We have listed eight sites as the most improved from last year, three of which were rated as **C** sites (now **T** sites) and five of which were rated as just **P** sites (now **C+**). If a local authority has the will to improve and makes good use of surveys such as this, which help in the discovery of best practice, it is quite feasible to make this level of improvement. The potential for doing this, however, is fast disappearing as sites gradually move away from being purely promotional.

Examples of good practice:
Now a transactional site
● Burnley BC

● Derbyshire CC

● Shropshire CC

Now a content plus site (promotional site 12 months ago)
● Isles of Scilly

● Pembrokeshire CC

● Perth & Kinross

● Powys CC

● Scottish Borders

Going backwards?

Many readers will compare our assessments of their own local authorities this year with last and see that they appear not to be going forward, despite some effort to do so or, more worryingly, going backwards with a worse assessment than last year.

There are some important points to make to these readers:

● Expectations about site standards are rising all the time, and that inevitably affects both our reviewers and our questionnaire. For example, three sites that were transactional last year are not transactional this year, because of specific problems experienced by more than one reviewer when using the site now, which were not obvious twelve months ago.

● The best sites tend to be the most committed to improvement, whilst poorer sites often remain static over a 12-month period.

● Changes in our survey questions from last year may lead to some differences in results.

● The full complexity of local government services and priorities is impossible to test in the scope of a survey of this nature. The changing focus of our questions each year tests different strengths and weaknesses.

● Variations in the accessibility and usability of different sites may have obscured good web content in some cases. There is much evidence this year of more functionality being added but at the cost of usability.

● While all the reviewers followed standard survey guidelines and criteria, final website assessments necessarily reflect an element of subjectivity.

In short, website development is a very dynamic activity subject to changing tastes and developments. It is, therefore, not surprising that our website assessments will fluctuate. The lesson to be drawn from this is to manage websites flexibly, never assuming that what worked one year will necessarily work in the next, and to seek constantly to improve both content and usability.

More and more councils are using content management systems to run their websites, and many of these work well and offer powerful built-in navigation features and integrated and consistent design. However, some councils are just using these out of the box and failing to customise them properly, with the result that some sites are full of blank areas or go round and round in circles as navigation features just link to each other, and redundant areas have not been stripped out.

Reviewer 1

The range of functions of websites seem to have increased, but not necessarily the usability. I think one of the reasons is that functions have been largely supplied by 'bolt-ons' from third party suppliers and the navigation, together with the consistent look and feel of the website, is often compromised.

Reviewer 2

3.6 Profile by type of authority

Summary of improvement

This chart shows the average ranking for each type of council, and how that has improved from 2005.
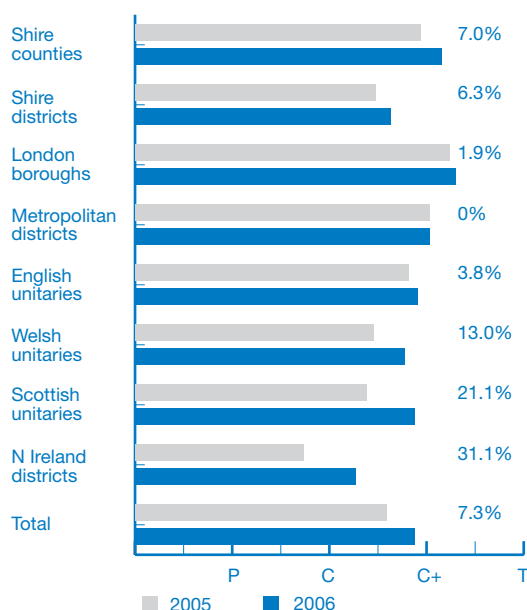
Chart 11a Summary of current development by type of council
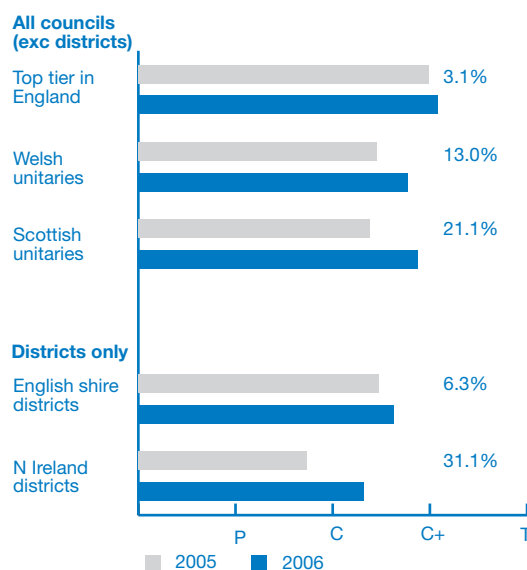
Chart 11b Summary of current development by country

These two charts illustrate that:

- London boroughs are on average 8% more advanced than shire counties and 9% more advanced than metropolitan districts

- taken together all 150 top tier councils in England are on average 21% more advanced than shire districts

- the same 150 top tier councils in England are 7% more advanced than the 32 councils in Scotland and 11% more advanced than the 22 in Wales

- the 238 shire districts in England are 16% more advanced than the districts in Northern Ireland.

Finally, when reflecting on this picture, we should remember that expectations of websites continue to rise. Although based on the same structure as for previous years, our survey contained additional or different questions and the expectations of our reviewers reflect those of the general public.

In the rest of this section, we provide a series of eight pairs of charts showing the state of websites by type of authority. In selecting the top councils for each type, we have aimed to select a minimum of three councils and a maximum of ten councils in each type. We have used the same criteria as we did in selecting the Top 20 websites earlier in this section, but have relaxed the standards applied for each type in order to be able to list the best for each type.

Appendix 1 sets out more detailed tables to support these profiles.

Key messages

- **London boroughs still lead the way in website development in England, marginally ahead of shire counties and metropolitan districts.**

- **Councils in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland continue to be much less well developed than their counterparts in England with their websites, probably reflecting the lack of the same central government funding and direction that English councils have experienced.**

Shire counties

Content (12%)
Transactional (26%)
Content plus (62%)
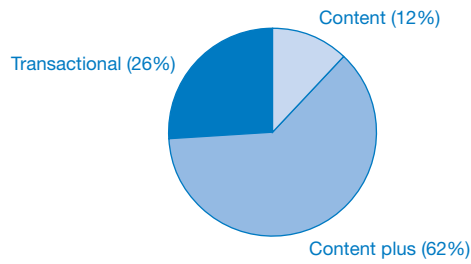
Chart 12a Website rankings by shire counties

| | 2005 | 2006 | No of sites |
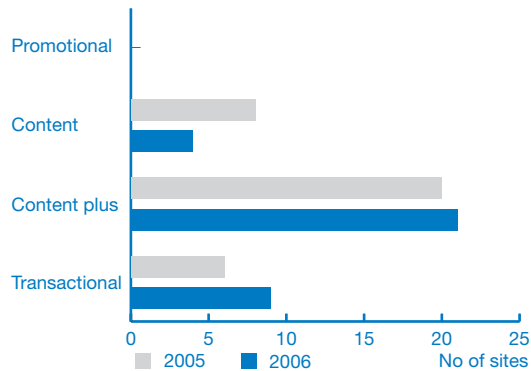
Chart 12b Website rankings by shire counties (comparison with last year)

Websites in shire counties continue to improve steadily in our surveys. There are five more **T** sites and four **C** sites have moved up to become **C+** sites. Two-thirds are now **C+** sites and several of those are not far short of **T** site status.

The top counties
(ie all those that are transactional sites)

- Derbyshire CC (New **T** site)

- Devon CC

- Durham CC

- East Sussex CC (New **T** site)

- Hertfordshire CC

- Lincolnshire CC (New **T** site)

- Shropshire CC (New **T** site)

- Surrey CC

- Warwickshire CC (New **T** site)

Shire districts

Transactional (6%)
Promotional (1%)
Content (43%)
Content plus (50%)
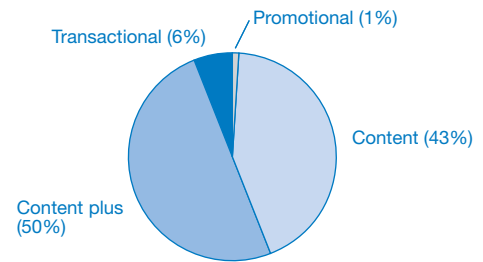
Chart 13a Website rankings by shire districts

| | 2005 | 2006 | No of sites |
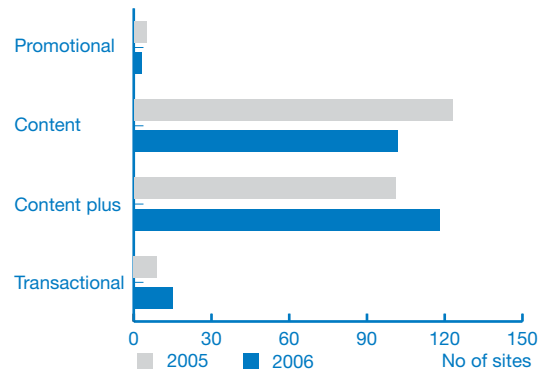
Chart 13b Website rankings by shire districts (comparison with last year)

Last year saw a significant improvement for shire district websites. This momentum has been maintained with seven new ones given **T** status and 21 moving up to **C+** status. Four of the new **T** sites now appear also in the list below as top shire districts. It will be interesting to see how they will be able to sustain their ranking over two to three years.

The top shire districts
(ie all those that are transactional sites, and have scored well on number of questions answered and ratings of scenarios and themes)

- Burnley BC (New **T** site)

- Canterbury BC (New **T** site)

- Chester City

- Cotswold DC

- Shrewsbury & Atcham BC (**T** site)

- Stroud DC

- Surrey Heath BC

- Tandridge DC (New **T** site)

- Warwick DC (New **T** site)

- Wealden DC

London boroughs

Content (9%)

Transactional (42%)

Content plus (45%)
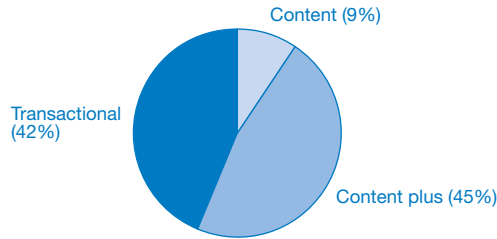
Chart 14a Website rankings by London boroughs

Unallocated

Content

Content plus

Transactional

0   5   10   15   20   25

2005   2006   No of sites
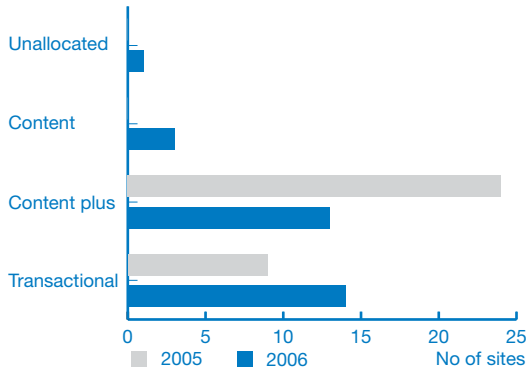
Chart 14b Website rankings by London boroughs
(comparison with last year)

Note: When we came to review it, the Haringey website was out of service in the last 10 days of the review period as a result of the Buncefield oil depot disaster. It was separately assessed in February 2006 as C+, but its results have not been included in the analyses.

London boroughs still remain the leaders in website development with another five new **T** sites and some others not far off that mark. However, three sites have slipped back from **C+** status to **C**.

The top London boroughs
(ie all those that are transactional sites, and have scored well on number of questions answered and ratings of scenarios and themes)

- Brent

- Camden

- Corporation of London

- Havering (New **T** site)

- Kensington & Chelsea

- Lambeth (New **T** site)

- Lewisham (New **T** site)

- Southwark (New **T** site)

- Wandsworth

- Westminster City

Metropolitan districts

Content (19%)

Transactional (22%)

Content plus (58%)

Chart 15a Website rankings by metropolitan districts

Promotional

Content

Content plus

Transactional

0   5   10   15   20   25

2005   2006   No of sites
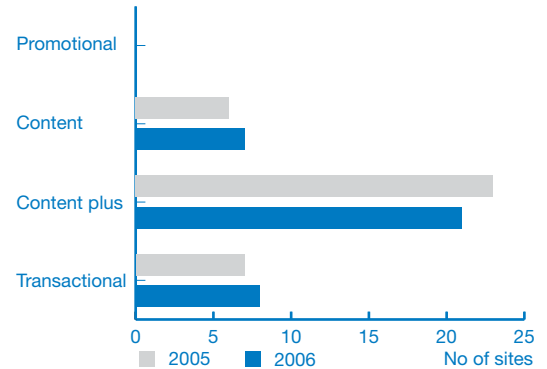
Chart 15b Website rankings by metropolitan districts
(comparison with last year)

After two years of steady progress, relatively little change was noticed last year with 28 out of 36 councils unchanged. Four councils moved up a rank, including one new **T** site, but four also dropped back.

The top metropolitan districts
(ie all those that are transactional sites)

- Birmingham City

- Dudley MBC

- Kirklees MBC

- Liverpool City

- Salford City

- South Tyneside MBC

- Tameside MBC

- Trafford MBC (New **T** site)

English unitaries

Transactional (21%)

Content (34%)

Content plus (45%)

Welsh unitaries

Transactional (5%)

Content (36%)

Content plus (59%)
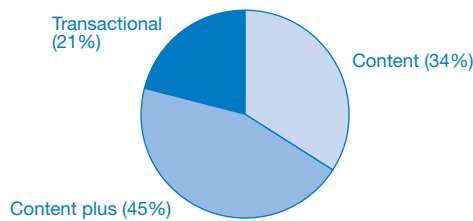
Chart 16a Website rankings by English unitaries

Promotional

Content

Content plus

Transactional

0 5 10 15 20 25 30

☐ 2005 ■ 2006 No of sites
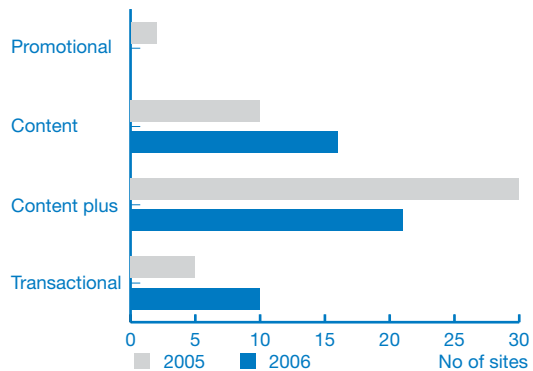
Chart 16b Website rankings by English unitaries (comparison with last year)

Chart 17a Website rankings by Welsh unitaries

Promotional

Content

Content plus

Transactional

0 3 6 9 12 15

☐ 2005 ■ 2006 No of sites
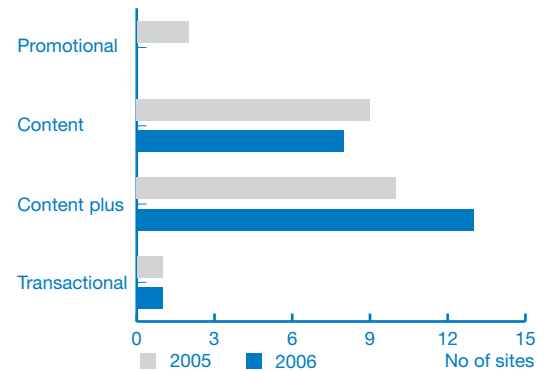
Chart 17b Website rankings by Welsh unitaries (comparison with last year)

After a year of little improvement, this group made much better progress last year with eleven sites moving up a rank, including five new **T** sites. On the other hand nine sites moved back a level from **C+** to **C**. Just half the group did not change their ranking.

The top English unitaries
(ie all those that are transactional sites)

- Bracknell Forest

- Brighton & Hove

- Derby City (New **T** site)

- Isle of Wight (New **T** site)

- Leicester City (New **T** site)

- Medway

- Milton Keynes (New **T** site)

- North Lincolnshire (New **T** site)

- Borough of Poole

- Thurrock BC

There has been very little improvement in council websites in Wales. All but three councils have remained at the same level as last year with just three moving into **C+**, two of them from **P** status. It also means that for the fourth year running there is just one **T** site with only one other within reach. The slow progress no doubt reflects the lack of policy and difficulty in obtaining funding support from the Welsh Assembly.

We should always remember that Welsh sites have a particular challenge that no other local government sites have in the obligation to support bi-lingual audiences. This is clearly a harder task than supporting one primary language, taking up resources that might in England be devoted to improvements.

The top Welsh unitaries
(ie all those that are at least 'content plus' sites, and have scored well on number of questions answered and ratings of scenarios and themes)

- Carmarthenshire CC

- Denbighshire CC

- Gwynedd CC

- Neath Port Talbot CBC

- Wrexham CBC (**T** site)

Scottish unitaries

Transactional (9%)
Content (34%)
Content plus (56%)
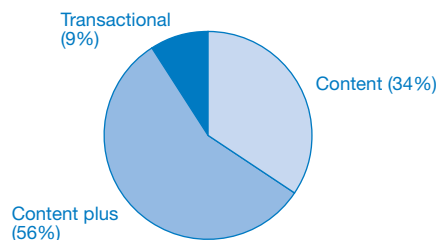
Chart 18a Website rankings by Scottish unitaries

Promotional		
Content		
Content plus		
Transactional		

0 5 10 15 20
☐ 2005 ■ 2006 No of sites
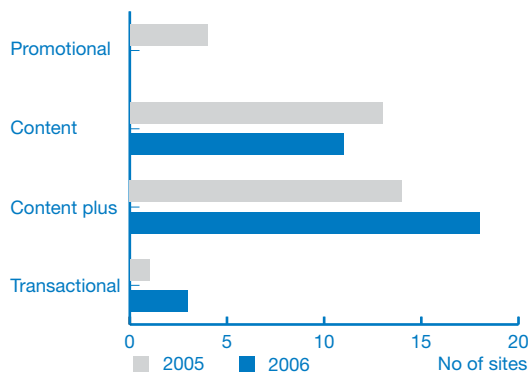
**Chart 18b Website rankings by Scottish unitaries
(comparison with last year)**

Compared with councils in Wales, those in Scotland have made much greater improvement. Ten have improved their ranking with two new **T** sites and two or three very near to being one, and also with two jumping up two levels from **P** site to **C+** site.

None have slipped back.

The top Scottish unitaries

(ie all those that are at least 'content plus' sites, and have scored well on number of questions answered and ratings of scenarios and themes)

- Aberdeenshire

- Clackmannanshire (new **T** site)

- East Ayrshire (**T** site)

- Fife

- Perth & Kinross

- South Ayrshire (new **T** site)

- Stirling

Northern Ireland districts

Content plus (8%)
Promotional (23%)
Content (69%)
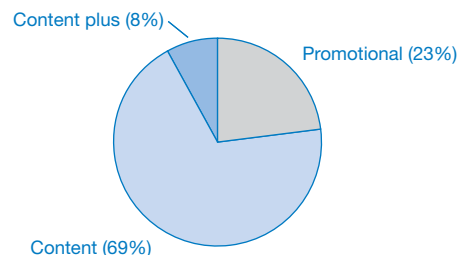
Chart 19a Website rankings by NI districts

Promotional		
Content		
Content plus		
Transactional		

0 5 10 15 20
☐ 2005 ■ 2006 No of sites
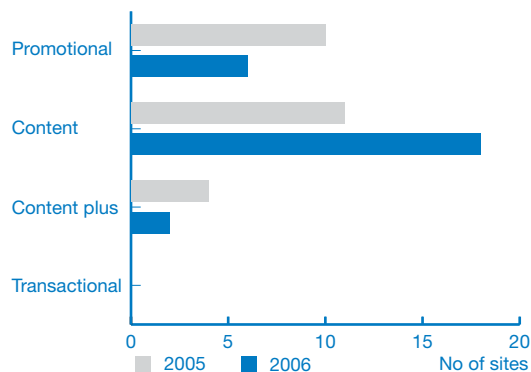
**Chart 19b Website rankings by NI districts
(comparison with last year)**

Belfast apart, the districts in Northern Ireland are the equivalent of the smallest shire districts in England and have, in our surveys, always been much less advanced than councils on the mainland. This year five councils have moved up from **P** sites to **C** sites, but two that were **C+** last year have dropped back to **C** status.

It should not be forgotten that local government in Northern Ireland is quite different from the rest of the UK and that district functions are more limited than in England. As a result our survey might be a little less generous to Northern Ireland councils, although their websites, of course, should at least be able to point visitors to more relevant sites (eg questions about schools should be re-directed to one of the five Education and Library Boards).

The top NI districts

(ie all those that are at least 'content' sites, and have scored well on number of questions answered and ratings of scenarios and themes)

- Ards BC

- Fermanagh DC

- Newtownabbey BC

- North Down BC

Note: The criteria for selecting the best-developed sites have been significantly relaxed for this group compared with other groups, as websites are less advanced.

Part C

This year's results — useful content

We describe the detailed analysis of the results, focusing firstly on content. We report here on three scenarios of typical visitors for information content, and then examine other aspects of content such as currency of information, use of links, provision of services, response to e-mail, and the practice of participation.

4   Useful content

Do people find answers to their questions?

Source of evidence: Main survey

Introduction to scenarios 1, 2 and 3

This report tests the information content of each website by using three typical scenarios selected from across the wide range of activity of a local authority.

Scenario 1   Licensing

Scenario 2   Moving house

Scenario 3   Jobs

The scenarios deliberately do not contain the simplest questions that one would expect to find in purely promotional sites. For the purposes of our survey, it is now taken for granted that websites should have such information.

This year we have selected just three scenarios to test information content. As last year, we decided to make the availability of interactive applications the first priority for the 2005 survey (linked with priority service outcomes in England), because 31 December 2005 was the target date for 100% electronic service delivery.

Further information: See Appendix 1 for results of survey

Evidence of success

It is virtually impossible to list all the information that a local authority website should be providing, but at a high level it should:

Essential criteria
- provide information about **all council services** and how the public may use them

- provide information to meet the **needs of the many different groups of users** (eg the old, the young, the employed, the unemployed)

- provide information about **democratic processes**, (eg councillors, meetings, elections, participation etc)

- provide information about the **workings and funding of local government** (eg workings of the council tax)

- provide information about the content of **all recent public documents** (ie in the official publications list), including, for the most important documents, the facility to search and download them in full or in part

- provide **links** to additional information at appropriate levels to **other agencies delivering services in, or on behalf of, the local public and voluntary sector** (eg as part of local strategic partnerships)

- provide **links** to extend information at appropriate levels to **national agencies** that complement and support local government (eg central government, single issue websites)

Desirable criteria
- provide information that responds to the **frequently asked questions** (eg indicated by queries at contact or call centres, or from search terms used on the websites).

Extract from *Better connected: aiming high*

4.1 Information (Scenario 1) — Resident enquiring about new licensing regulations

Do people find answers to their questions?

Source of evidence: Main survey

Context

One of the most controversial issues in England and Wales has been the implementation of the Licensing Act 2003 and the extension of opening hours for pubs and bars. This reached a critical stage in November 2005 when the closing date for receiving objections to proposed extensions was set.

This is a very appropriate scenario to test because it is a piece of new legislation, not always easy to understand, and because the local authority has to balance the interests of both the general public and licensees running local businesses. This scenario tests the provision of basic information and the handling of associated transactions (eg applications, objections and complaints).

The legislation does not cover Scotland and Northern Ireland. In Scotland councils do issue alcohol licences but this latest legislation does not apply. In Northern Ireland, alcohol licences are not issued at all, but in order to test the basic licensing process we investigated dog licences which councils do issue.

Chart 20a Summary of scenario 1 (exc counties)
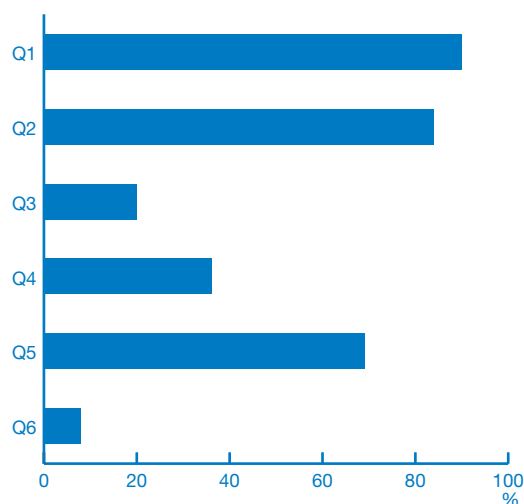
Chart 20b Analysis of scenario 1

Questions

Q1   Can I find out who to apply to for a licence to serve alcohol?
(Keywords: licence, licensing, alcohol)

In the case of shire counties sites should point visitors to district sites with a deep link to the licensing section.

Q2   Can I find a copy of the council's licensing policy? (Keywords: Licensing policy)

Q3   Can I view the licensing register online to find out about the licence of a nearby pub? (Keywords: licensing register, register of licences)

Q4   Is there guidance on how I might be able to comment on a proposed wine bar in my area? (Keywords: licensing objection, licensing comment, licensing proposal)

Q5   Is there a form and guidance that I can download to apply for a personal licence? (or Scottish equivalent) (Keywords: personal licence, alcohol licence)

Q6   Can I make a complaint online about a licensed premise? (Keywords: complain, problem, pub, wine bar)

Analysis

The first question just checks about how potential licensees need to apply for a licence. A very large percentage (90%) supplies this information. This was followed by a request of a licensing policy. Once again a large number (84%) provide this information.

These two straightforward questions then led to a request for information that is much complicated to provide — direct access to the licensing register. If we exclude some councils that provide information about just the current week's applications, only one out of five councils provide this facility.

The next question concerns guidance about commenting on a proposal. Here, 36% of councils provide general guidance on who can comment and how to go about commenting on a proposal for a drinking establishment/alcohol licence. We did not expect more specific guidance about a particular proposal.

We then asked about the process of applying for a licence. Over two-thirds (69%) provide a form to download supported by some guidance.

The final question takes us right to the end of the process, as it concerns the making of an online complaint. It is little surprise that this brings out the lowest response with just 8% offering this option.

One final observation not related to any specific question concerned the currency of information. We started the survey immediately before the effective date of the legislation, yet many councils had some badly out-of-date information about the implementation of the Act.

Examples of good practice (England)
(ie all those rated very good and with all six 'Yes' answers recorded)

- Ashford BC
- Hammersmith & Fulham
- Harrow
- Borough of Poole
- Reigate & Banstead BC
- Runnymede BC

Scotland
Scottish councils do less well than their English counterparts with an average of two questions answered per council, compared with a little over three in England. The lack of imminent legislation makes this less of a pressure point in Scotland, although councils in Wales, where the new legislation does apply, fared no better than those in Scotland.

Northern Ireland
As alcohol licences are not issued by councils in Northern Ireland, we looked for information about dog licences which are. In practical terms, only Q5 was directly relevant and on this 12 out of the 26 councils in the province provided the facility to download forms, of which the best was Newtownabbey BC.

Shire counties
The scenario largely ignores shire counties who have no licensing responsibilities. Nevertheless, the general public may not know this and we would expect county websites to point visitors to the appropriate district website. In practice 14 out of 34 counties do this, some very well (eg Cheshire CC).

Examples of good practice (shire counties)
(ie all those that referred visitors to district sites in the county)

- Cheshire CC
- Cornwall CC
- Cumbria CC
- Devon CC
- Dorset CC
- Durham CC
- Gloucestershire CC
- Hampshire CC
- Leicestershire CC
- Lincolnshire CC
- North Yorkshire CC
- Nottinghamshire CC
- Suffolk CC

✔ **Cheshire CC**
On looking to find information about licence applications, I found a page with the names of all the districts and even a map of the area with links through. Excellent stuff.

✔ **Newtownabbey BC**
Very comprehensive section on dog control written in Plain English and attractively laid out.

✔ **Ashford BC**
Wow! This website provides excellent information about licensing and has a complete set of transactions relating to the Licensing Act 2003. A series of pages describe the processes involved and enable users to follow a pathway that results in either carrying out an application and registering it online, viewing the licensing register online or commenting on an application online. This is easy to use, easy to understand and very impressive! (NB: no entry, though, for licensing in the A to Z of services)

Key messages

● **Check how well your website deals with information about alcohol licensing.**

● **Consider in particular each step in the process of making an application from the viewpoint of both the member of public in the local area and the potential licensee.**

● **If a shire county, check that your website points visitors to the appropriate district council websites at the appropriate place.**

● **For all organisations, review the way in which your website provides information and transactions about all the licences that your organisation issues.**

Further information: See Appendix 1 for results of survey

If subscriber, visit *How did your council do?*, the subscriber-only area of www.socitm.gov.uk

✔ **Cotswold DC**
The web pages relating to the new licensing act are really excellent. Clear, concise and well organised. The online register is excellent and enables users to search using a number of different criteria. This is a model for other authority websites to follow. I also liked the fact that there was a link to this section from the hot topics list on the home page.

✔ **South Oxfordshire DC**
A superb licensing section which explains the new elements of the Act in plain English. South Oxfordshire have launched a ground-breaking online licensing application whereby people can apply for, and look at, licensing applications online. The only snag is that you can only see applications which are submitted online on the web. It does not seem very well used yet, so I can't see anything, but it is a move in the right direction.

✔ **Reigate & Banstead BC**
It was excellent to see such a comprehensive licensing section so soon after the legislation has come into force. These included search facilities for licence applications and the ability to object to applications.

✔ **City of York**
Excellent information, clearly presented. The first site I've seen where it spells out exactly how and where you should send your objection to a licence application.

4.2 Information (Scenario 2) – Family on the move and enquiring about schools information

Do people find answers to their questions?

Source of evidence: Main survey

Context

Information about schools usually comes high on the list of website applications (eg as reported by our website service). It seems sensible to test out how well council websites deal with the information provided by local education authorities and how well they linked with the growing number of individual school sites.

There are a number of important pieces of information that parents potentially need to find out quickly when planning a family move, especially into a new area, and are clearly ideal for the council website to provide (eg travel to school, admissions, 'after-school' clubs etc).

From the viewpoint of shire district sites, this is a very relevant way of testing links back to the county sites, because the information will be found on the county site. This is a mirror image of the test of joining-up on licensing regulations in the first scenario in this survey, when counties have to refer visitors to the district sites.

Questions

Q9 Can I find a list of schools with links to school websites?
(Keywords: schools, school websites)

In the case of shire districts sites should point visitors to county sites with a deep link to the schools section.

Q10 Are schools shown on a map?
(Keywords: schools, map)

Q11 Does a search for 'bullying' point to information for parents or guardians?
(Keywords: bullying at school, bullying)

Q12 Does a search on 'school travel' lead to details of the arrangements for getting to school?

Q13 Can I find out about 'after-school' clubs?
(Keywords: After school club, childcare, out of school clubs)

Q14 Can I find information on educational arrangements for 'looked after children'?
(Keywords: looked after children, children in care)
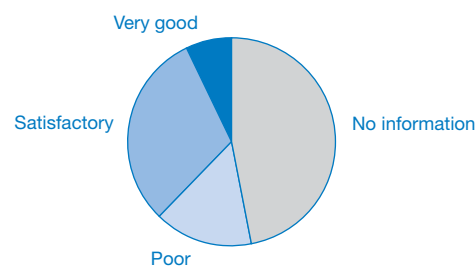
Chart 21a Summary of scenario 2
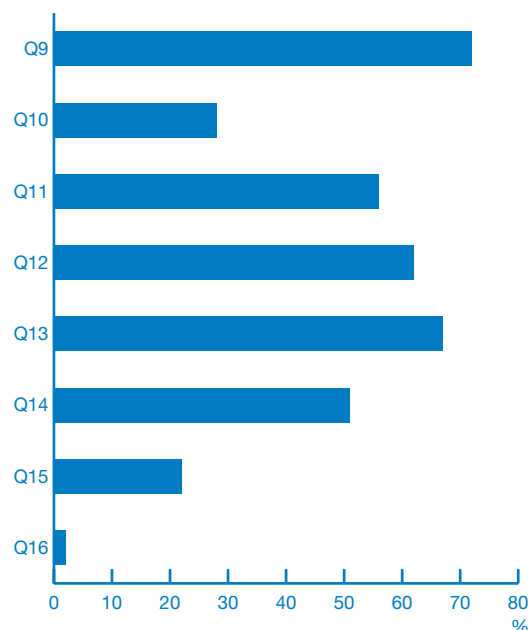
Chart 21b Analysis of scenario 2

Q15 Can I apply online for a school place?
(Keywords: school place, application)

Q16 Can I pay for school meals online?
(Keywords: School meals, payment)

Analysis

This scenario starts with a question about a simple list of schools with information about school websites. Nearly three-quarters of education authorities provide this information (72%). Not all schools have websites and the test here is whether the local education authority pointed to those that did have websites. If it was not immediately clear whether there are links to websites within the schools directory, the reviewer checked the individual details for up to three schools to see if there is a link. This is very basic information that is fundamental to the role of the local education authority and the surprise is that as many as 28% do not have lists of school websites. For example, over half the councils in Scotland are missing this information (but only two in Wales lack it) and most surprisingly given the choices and publicity about schools in the capital, ten London boroughs did not have the information.

The second question develops from the first by asking for a map that shows the location of schools. A link to Multimap for individual schools was not deemed sufficient. Some 57 councils (28% of local education authorities) offer such a facility and some are very good (see section 5.4 on use of locational information).

One issue that has become very sensitive over the past few years is the one about bullying at school. Whilst the policies at individual schools are most important, it is also important that education authorities have policies and information (eg what recourse do parents have if not satisfied with the practice at a particular school?). 56% of education authorities have information about bullying that can be found by a search facility, a particularly useful way of applying a search because it might not be easy information to find via a more structured route.

Selecting a school must take into account the journey from home to school, with mounting traffic problems almost everywhere and the numbers of working parents also increasing. We asked for information about 'school travel', putting that phrase exactly into the search facility and found that 62% came back with pointers to information on the topic.

'After school clubs' are also an important feature of school life today. We found that two in three education authorities (67%) offer information on their websites.

The education of 'looked after' children is also a cause of concern for many. On this topic we discovered that just over half (51%) provide some information.

Finally, we asked two questions about transactional services. The first concerns school admissions. Some 45 education authorities (22%) now offer online school admissions, promoted no doubt by the national project in England. In fact, only one of the 44 comes from outside England, but a far greater surprise is that only one of the 44 is a London borough, despite admission policies in London being more of a political issue than elsewhere and despite the generally higher level of sophistication of London websites.

Hertfordshire CC has led the way with this facility and now 64% of all admissions are made online. This is clearly a success story waiting to be repeated across the country.

The second question concerns online payment for school meals. First introduced very successfully by Surrey CC, now just four additional education authorities offer the facility — Devon CC, Kingston, Tower Hamlets and, in Scotland, East Lothian.

It may be that the different ways of organising and paying for schools meals makes this a less than straightforward task.

Shire districts

The scenario largely ignores shire districts (and districts in Northern Ireland) that have no responsibilities for schools. Nevertheless, the general public may not know this and we would expect district websites to point visitors to the appropriate county website. In practice 172 out of 238 districts (72%) do this, some very well (see list below) of which four come from Staffordshire and another three from the North West.

Examples of good practice (shire districts)
(ie all those that referred visitors to county sites and were rated very good in doing so)

- Breckland DC
- Chester City
- East Staffordshire BC
- Lancaster City
- Lichfield DC
- South Cambridgeshire DC
- Staffordshire Moorlands DC
- Tamworth BC
- West Lancashire DC

Examples of good practice (local education authorities)
(ie all those rated very good and with seven out of eight 'Yes' answers recorded)

- Buckinghamshire CC
- Darlington BC
- Devon CC (all eight questions answered)
- Leicester City
- Plymouth City
- Shropshire CC
- St. Helens MBC
- Surrey CC (all eight questions answered)
- Wiltshire CC

Northern Ireland
Districts in Northern Ireland do not have responsibility for schools. Nevertheless, four councils provided information rated in the context of Northern Ireland as satisfactory (Ballymena BC, Banbridge DC, Newtownabbey BC and North Down BC). One would reasonably expect that such a high profile local public service should be recognised on all district sites, not just on four of them.

List of useful sites
www.ace-ed.org.uk
An independent charity offering information about state education to parents of school children in England and Wales

www.antibullying.net
Advice and support for children, parents and teachers

www.bullying.co.uk
Advice and information about bullying for children, parents and teachers

www.childcarelink.gov.uk
National childcare listing for parents and childcare providers

www.myschoollunch.co.uk
Promotes school lunches and provides healthy eating info and games for kids, parents and teachers.

www.parentscentre.gov.uk
Information and support for parents covering a wide range of topics related to childcare and education

www.raisingkids.co.uk
Practical parenting advice

www.saferoutestoschool.org.uk
Find safe ways for children to get to and from school

www.ngfl-cymru.org.uk
Search for schools in Wales

www.education-support.org.uk
Information for parents and students covering a wide range of education issues and links to the various NI education boards

Key messages

● Check how well your website deals with information about schools, and in linking to school websites.

● If a shire district, check that your website points visitors to the appropriate county council website at the appropriate place.

● Make sure that your website has relevant information for potential parents about a range of practical issues (eg travel to school) and those issues that might be of concern (eg school bullying policies).

● Plan to introduce online school admission facilities as quickly as possible.

Further information: See Appendix 1 for results of survey

If subscriber, visit *How did your council do?*, the subscriber-only area of www.socitm.gov.uk

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✔ **Devon CC**
Excellent map for designated areas (catchments). Excellent schools information including school meal payments for participating schools.

✔ **Plymouth City**
Amazing mapping for schools in Plymouth! Really excellent for education related information.

✔ **Staffordshire Moorlands DC**
Even though the council is not responsible for the education services, there is still a wealth of information, with good deep links to the relevant sites. This is really well done.

✔ **Surrey CC**
Excellent information and transactional facilities for parents! Each school entry has links to not just a website, but their Ofsted and performance reports.

4.3 Information (Scenario 3) — Working parent looking for new job

Do people find answers to their questions?

Source of evidence: Main survey

Context
Our website take-up service shows time and again that the number one application for council websites is the search for new jobs. As a result we have built a scenario about looking for a job online. Websites should now be able to offer a facility that is totally self-service leading to a job application being submitted online. In some cases certain parts of the assessment procedure might also be automated (eg testing of skills of numeracy and ICT literacy).

Questions
Q19 Does the job vacancies home page present information (or links to other resources) that promotes working for the council?
(Keywords: jobs, job vacancies)

Q20 Do the jobs pages link to information about local childcare for working parents?

Q21 Can I register to receive job vacancies of interest to me by e-mail?
(Keyword: job vacancies, e-mail alerts)

Q22 Can I download a job application form?
(Keywords: job application, application form)

Q23 Can I apply for a job using an online form?
(Keywords: online application)

Q24 Is there guidance with the application form on how they will handle the data collected eg privacy policy/data protection?

Analysis
We did not just ask whether jobs are advertised online, reasoning that all councils should by now at least be able to carry out that task. Our first question sought information that helped promote the idea of working for the council (eg information about the area, working conditions in the council, council's priorities), because the website itself is an ideal vehicle for promoting employment.

The second question develops from the first by assessing whether the jobs facility points potential employees to information about childcare arrangements. We would expect to find this somewhere else on the same website, except in the cases of shire districts which would have to point visitors to the relevant part of county websites. On this question just 40 councils (9%) passed the test.
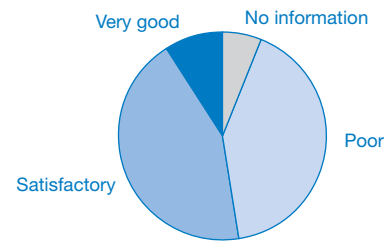
Chart 22a Summary of scenario 3
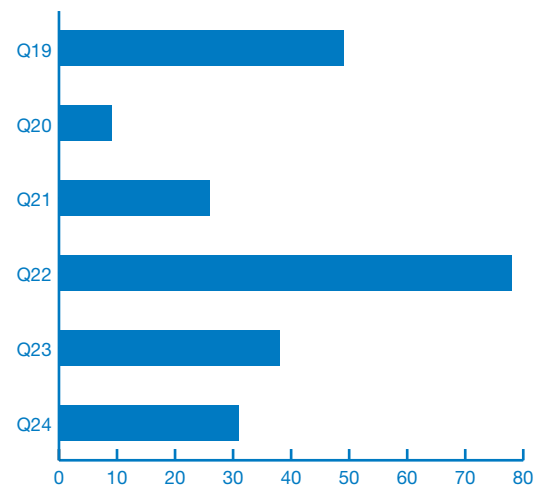
Chart 22b Analysis of scenario 3

Rather than rely on the potential applicant going to the website, a job can go to the applicant by the use of an e-mail alert. We asked our next question about such a facility. We expected the facility to specify the type of vacancy or council department that the person might be interested in, rather than just receiving the full weekly bulletin. Just over one quarter (26%) now offer this option.

The next step in the process is obtaining the application form. One would expect that almost all councils would provide this if they advertised online. In practice, 367 websites (78%) did offer the downloading of the application form (either as a Word document or as a '.pdf' form).

Offering facilities for downloading application forms is, of course, just the first step in making the whole process online. The next step is to allow completion and submission of the job application. Our next question found that 38% now offer this facility, ie half of those who allow application forms to be downloaded.

Our final question concerns privacy and data protection policies that online job applications will prompt. Just less than one-third of websites (31%) provide such guidance as candidates start to complete their application.

The process of finding and applying for a job

At first glance the process of applying for a job online may seem quite straightforward, but in practice it breaks down into ten steps. We assumed that users all start from the home page, and then go through these steps (although they may not describe them like this, or follow them in exactly this order):

1   Find the jobs section of the website.

2   Review a list of available jobs.

3   Select a suitable job.

4   Understand the application process.

5   Fill in the application form with personal information.

6   Look back to the job description/person description.

7   Save the form partly completed while verifying more detailed information such as references.

8   Re-open the application and finish filling it in.

9   Print the application for a record (and possibly a final review).

10 Submit the application.

Supported by:

39 steps to success
Best practice tips for online job applications

Extract from *Better connected 2005*

Examples of good practice
(ie all those rated very good and all six 'Yes' answers recorded)

● Buckinghamshire CC

● Enfield

● Leicester City

● Monmouthshire CC

● Salford City

● South Gloucestershire

● Southwark

● Surrey CC

● Wandsworth

● Waverley BC

Key messages

● **Ensure that your website has a comprehensive and up-to-date section that is easy to find and covers job vacancies in your organisation.**

● **Automate the job application process as far as possible.**

● **Consider carefully the best practice tips for online job applications.**

● **Offer an e-mail and/or text alert facility to advise those who might be interested about new vacancies.**

Further information: See Appendix 1 for results of survey

If subscriber, visit *How did your council do?*, the subscriber-only area of www.socitm.gov.uk

✔ **Monmouthshire CC**
A very good jobs facility that enables applicants to save their online applications partially completed and also has the facility for completing 'pdf' applications on screen before printing.

✔ **North East Lincolnshire**
You can play a video to entice you to come and work and live in the area. I thought this was a good use of video.

✔ **Leicester City**
Excellent — clear, instructive and easy to use.

✔ **Southwark**
I'm not sure why there is a need for a standalone jobs website, but it's full of information, easy to use, and even made me look to see if they had any suitable vacancies for me. They hadn't!

✔ **Warwickshire CC**
Very good online job application facility. Following registration you can complete forms online, save partially completed forms and create a standard application. There's also a 'Find nearest job vacancy to you' by a postcode search, and it displays a map of all the jobs on offer.

4.4 Currency

Can people rely on the site being up to date?

Source of evidence: Main survey

Evidence of success

It is very difficult to keep a comprehensive website fully updated, but it is important to remember that out-of-date information is sometimes worse than no information at all. As a minimum the website should meet the following standard.

Essential criteria

- All information about **council-managed services** should be kept up to date, such as council and committee meetings, consultation processes and operational activities (eg planning applications and decisions, service performance). This includes agendas and minutes as well as the events themselves.

- **Press releases** should have a list of items in reverse date sequence and should indicate if related documents are elsewhere on the site; if so, should provide links to where they can be downloaded.

- All information about **council decisions** should be up to date and published in accordance with a stated policy (eg as soon as council minutes are published) with contact details for any further information.

- Any **What's On** facility should display a list of forthcoming events at least over the next month if not longer (not just council events). It should not display events that have taken place, except very recent ones (say, in the past two weeks).

- **Major new initiatives** that impact on citizens should be promoted (eg service improvements).

- **All legislative changes**, proposed or recently enacted, that affect the community (eg Freedom of Information, changes in electoral registration, changes in licensing regulations etc) should be announced promptly.

- **Obviously old and out-of-date information** (eg past press releases, closed consultations mixed up with current ones) should not be visible, except through mechanisms of formal archiving and retrieval.

Desirable criteria

- Information and documents should be **clearly dated**.

- **Links to other sites** are up to date as well as relevant (eg changes of name of central government departments).

- **Community databases** managed by third parties should be clearly identified as not council-owned but should be encouraged to be kept up to date.

Extract from *Better connected: aiming high*

Context

There is little doubt that the task of keeping website information up to date is a mountainous one, the more sophisticated its facilities become. Yet out-of-date information immediately undermines the visitor's confidence in the website, especially if it is time-dependent information (eg announcing as forthcoming events those that have already taken place). Our questions provide some test of the currency of information on the website.

Questions

Q38 Can external organisations submit new or revised information online for the community database? (Keywords: community information, update, clubs, groups)

Q39 Can I access a personal web page for my local councillor? (Keyword: councillor)

Q40 Is there evidence that the website is used to conduct online consultations? (Keyword: consultation)

Q41 Can I see the results of any consultations? (Keyword: consultation results)

Q78 Is there a link to the 'Get Safe Online' campaign website? (www.getsafeonline.org)

Chart 23a Summary of currency
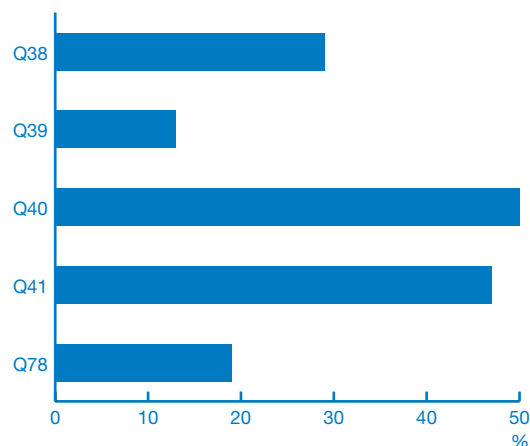
Chart 23b Analysis of currency

Analysis

All our questions concerned relatively advanced features of a website that really identify those that strive to be up to date, rather than focus on more obvious aspects of sites being out of date.

Our first question concerns the facility for third parties to update any community database directly and so encouraging the website to be kept up to date. This excludes any 'What's on' facility. Just fewer than three councils in ten provide such a facility.

Another feature that encourages an up-to-date feel to the website is the presence of personal web pages for councillors. This must contain more than just contact details and surgery times, eg should include some sort of personal message or link to personal site or www.councillor.info. The test here was to check three councillors at random and register a 'Yes' answer if one or more has such a personal page. We found that 13% of council websites have this facility.

The next two questions concern the use of online consultations. Exactly one in two councils has online consultations. This excludes online polls or e-panels but includes cases where a well-presented document encourages people to send an e-mail as consultation. In our next question

about evidence of results of consultation (whether online or not) we found that 47% of councils had such evidence.

Our fifth and final question concerned an item that tested the responsiveness of councils on a topic that should be close to web managers' hearts — online security. Just before our review started, a new website called Get Safe Online was launched to help website visitors protect themselves against internet threats. The site is sponsored by government and leading businesses working together to provide a free public service.

Socitm, indeed, broadcast a message to its members advising them about this new website. By the time of the review, just under one in five councils had put a link to their website about this extremely useful new source of information for the unwary.

Finally, at the end of the survey reviewers were asked if they had seen any obviously out-of-date information. In 22% of cases this had been noticed by the reviewer, although this is only a rough indicator of information being out of date.

Examples of good practice
(ie all those rated very good and at least four questions answered out of five)
(Note: Three which qualify have been omitted as a result of out-of-date information being recorded in response to Q93 in the main survey)

● Crawley BC

● Darlington BC

● Hastings BC

● Havering

● Leicestershire CC

● North Ayrshire

● Salford City (all five questions answered)

● Shropshire CC (all five questions answered)

● South Tyneside MBC

● Tandridge DC

● Thurrock BC

● West Dorset DC (all five questions answered)

✔ **Carmarthenshire CC**
This site is really current and up to date. On the day that I reviewed this site, there was information about the forthcoming bad weather and notices about schools that were currently closed due to the snow and ice. There are also lots of up-to-date events and news stories. There's also a discussion forum that seems reasonably up to date.

✔ **Guildford BC**
There was a whole section on Christmas events, bin collection times and useful information over the festive period.

✔ **Tonbridge & Malling BC**
This site seems really up to date with lots of news and events on the home page. The sports club database has an online form for adding your club's information. The consultation pages are situated within the community information pages and include both results and new consultations with a simple well-laid-out online form. There's also a link to this area from the home page. Excellent!

✔ **Durham CC**
Interesting and current 'Quick Poll' on whether you intend to have a flu jab.

Key messages

● **Commit to keeping the website up to date and remember that out-of-date information is worse than no information.**

● **Publish the principles you use for keeping your site up to date.**

● **Encourage third parties whose information you publish to keep it up to date.**

● **Make sure that advance notices of key decisions and minutes of council meetings are added regularly to the website.**

● **Encourage councillors to use and update personal web pages.**

● **Use your website for online consultations, not forgetting to put the consultation results online as well.**

● **Do not allow your 'What's on?' diary to get out of date (or any other time-dependent piece of information).**

● **Make sure that changing legal requirements are updated (eg Licensing Act 2003).**

● **Do not miss opportunities to promote major initiatives for improving services.**

● **Do not forget to put links to useful new websites (eg Get Safe Online).**

Further information: See Appendix 1 for results of survey

If subscriber, visit *How did your council do?*, the subscriber-only area of www.socitm.gov.uk

✗ **Examples of bad practice on just one site**
● The first result when I searched for a page about tenders took me to an invitation to tender page where applicants were told the tender deadline is 12/12/2003 for provision of the service in January 2004. This page appears to have been updated in March 2005!

● Crime and disorder strategy is for the year 1999-2000 and the text describes aims to 'reduce incidents over the next twelve months to 1 April 2000'.

● There's no feeling of currency about this site. Lots of pages seem to be out of date and the home page doesn't have any of the up-to-date news and events that you'd expect to see on a council website home page.

● Found road gritting information for winter 2003/04 but not 04/05 or 05/06!

4.5 Links elsewhere

Are people referred to another organisation if the council does not have the information?

Source of evidence: Main survey

Evidence of success
Scope of links

Essential criteria
Evidence from *Better connected* surveys suggests that, unless there is a compelling reason for non-inclusion, links must be included for the following sites:

Should link with other local agencies:

- Neighbouring local authorities (eg physically adjacent, in same county or sub-region)

- Local parts of National Health Service (strategic health authorities, primary care trusts, hospitals, GPs and pharmacists)

- Emergency services (police, fire and rescue and ambulance services)

Should link with local community:

- Social housing agencies and associations

- Parish councils (or, if not owning websites, site should have contact details)

- Local community and support groups, including any community portal

- Voluntary sector agencies (eg Citizens' Advice Bureaux, Age Concern)

- All schools in the area

- Further and higher education and careers services (including individual colleges)

- Business links and local businesses

- Local transport agencies (bus, train and plane)

Should link with national levels of government:

- The Directgov website

- Central government (especially ODPM, DTI, DfES, DoH, Home Office plus regional Government Offices and numerous agencies such as JobCentre Plus)

- National Assembly for Wales, the Scottish Executive or the Northern Ireland Assembly (as appropriate)

- National transport agencies (bus, train and plane)

- Regional assemblies, chambers and development agencies in England

Should link where appropriate with others:

- Companies delivering major services under contract, including arms-length management organisations (ALMOs)

- Organisations providing portals that cover council services or activities

Note that the boundary between the public and private sectors may be blurred on some of these topics (eg transport). It is best to err on the side of whether the public is likely to perceive a function being part of the public sector.

Extract from *Better connected: aiming high*

Quality of linking

Essential criteria

- Should have **deep links directly** to that part of the website that helps build comprehensive information for a specific subject (see note below)

- Should have links that are **relevant and carefully chosen**, taking care not to promote irrelevant or contentious sites

- Should indicate what information will be **available before** the link is made

- Should ensure **common terminology** across closely related websites

- Should ensure **navigational devices** (eg search engines and A to Z lists) cover all local authorities in a defined area and clearly explain what they cover

- Wherever possible, should have **robust, consistent approach** to linking with and leaving external sites

Note: Whilst desirable in terms of ease of access to information, deep linking can be difficult for those trying to ensure that information and links remain current and accurate. Deep links need to be carefully considered and checked regularly if there is a risk of changes in the information structure. This needs to be balanced with the value of links to the home page where the visitor has to start searching somewhere new or different.

Context

The government system in the UK is complicated for the average person to understand. Finding public sector information should not require prior knowledge of the organisations that deliver local services. One of the strengths of the internet is that it can help to join up government information and services. At a local level, local authorities have a pivotal role in making this a reality by the way in which their websites are designed.

Questions

Q54 Does the site feature deep links to external sites?

Q55 Are external links explained before you click on them?

Q56 Does the information about benefits include links to DWP?
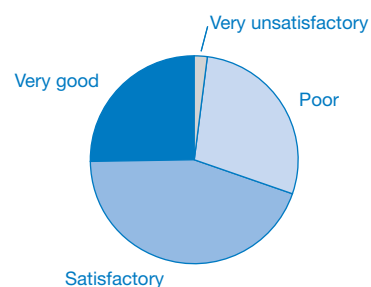
Chart 24a Summary of joined-up working
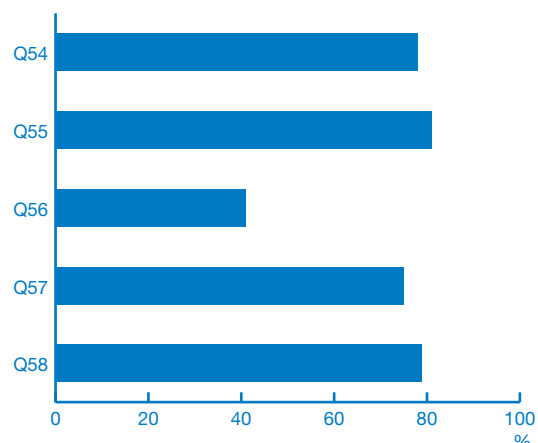
Chart 24b Analysis of joined-up working

Q57 Can I see details of the Crime and Disorder Partnership? (Keywords: crime and disorder, community safety)

Q58 Is there a link to Directgov on the home page?

Analysis

This theme in the main survey focused on how well joined-up sites are to other organisations. The first two questions are quite general and the last three questions are quite specific.

Three out of four organisations gave positive answers to the first two questions. On the first question we expected to see at least the name of the organisation, not just the website address. On the second question we expected some information to know that it was worth going to the external site — it was not enough just to see some unexplained acronyms. We asked the same two questions last year. There has been a modest improvement on both questions (7% and 6% respectively).

The first of the three specific questions tested for links to the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). 41% of councils gave this link. The percentage of answers does not vary greatly by types of council in England. Shire counties with no benefits functions had the same number of 'Yes' answers (41%) as elsewhere. In total 47% of English councils made this link.

Outside England the percentage dropped to 18% and in Northern Ireland to just one district in 26 (4%), even though the DWP is one central government department that stretches across the UK.
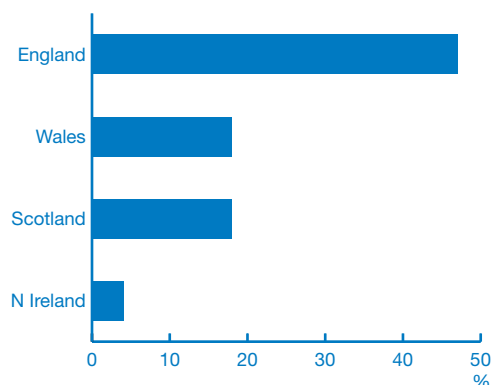
Chart 25 Analysis of DWP links by country

The second question concerns links to the Crime and Disorder Partnerships (community safety partnerships also acceptable). Encouragingly 75% of council websites had this link.

The final question looked for links to Directgov. A repeat question from last year's survey, the answers showed an increase from 73% to 79% (an extra 30 sites, but still short of 87 sites, or 62 sites if we exclude Northern Ireland). This particular external link is becoming an important one to maintain, especially in view of the very recent initiative into linking from Directgov directly into individual services at individual councils in England on presentation by the visitor of a postcode (January 2006).

Since the survey was completed, some 19 councils in England have added Directgov as at 29 January 2006, but that still leaves 29 councils without that link, even though they have worked with Directgov to build the link in the other direction!
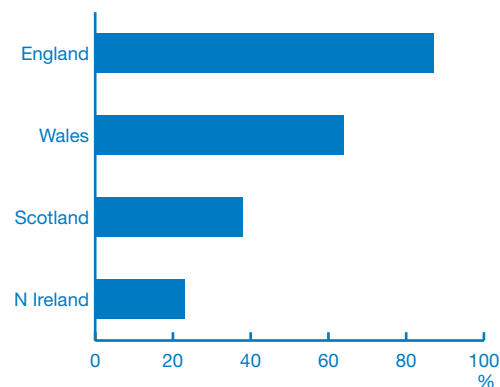
Chart 26 Analysis of Directgov links by country

This chart shows that by December 2005 49 councils in England (13%) still had not made the link to Directgov, although this has changed since the survey was completed in December 2005 as a result of the initiative linking from Directgov to councils. The chart also shows that the links to Directgov are progressively weaker in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland respectively, no doubt reflecting the different relationships with Whitehall.

Examples of good practice in England
Section 8 of this report provides a much fuller analysis of joined-up working and identifies five county areas where the evidence suggests that information and services do join up:

● Dorset

● East Sussex

● Lincolnshire

● Surrey

● Wiltshire

Examples of good practice outside England
(ie all those rated as very good and with at least four of five 'Yes' answers)

Scotland
● Aberdeenshire

● Clackmannanshire

● North Lanarkshire

● Perth & Kinross

● South Lanarkshire

Wales
● City & County of Swansea (all five questions answered)

● Wrexham CBC

Northern Ireland
● North Down BC (all five questions answered)

Key messages

● **Make sure that your site has links to all the other public sector organisations in our checklist.**

● **In particular, ensure that it links with Directgov from all parts of the UK.**

● **Provide links to other organisations that meet our criteria for quality of linking.**

● **Consider taking a subscription to one of many link check services that are available.**

Further information: See Appendix 1 for results of survey See Section 8 of this report for analysis of sub-regional working

If subscriber, visit *How did your council do?*, the subscriber-only area of www.socitm.gov.uk

✔ **Lewes DC**
I'm so used to finding the Directgov link hidden at the bottom of a home page that I nearly missed this one, which was given real prominence at the top of every page! Well done!

✔ **Leeds City**
Comprehensive and very useful external links associated with content and it was good to see Directgov clearly signposted on more than just the home page.

✔ **Lincolnshire CC**
Much thought has obviously been given to deep linking and joining-up of services, both locally and nationally.

✔ **Oxford City**
Excellent links to the county and also to external sites. I like the fact that links to external sites are clearly labelled so.

4.6   News value

Does the content capture people's attention by its newsworthiness?

Source of evidence: Special survey by
team member

Evidence of success

Essential criteria
● Should present council decisions, events, activities and projects **in the style of a news service**

● Should support **consultations** about local issues and give the results of recent ones with news about decisions taken as a result of the consultation

● Should promote news value with a **lively, dynamic home page** (eg links to current press releases)

● Should build on the sense of the locality and the local community with **local news stories** (or **local perspectives of national news stories**) accessible from the home page

● Should link up with **important local events** (eg arts events, charity runs) even if they are only loosely connected with the local authority

● Should be the key authoritative source of up-to-date information in **local emergencies** such as flooding or other severe weather

Desirable criteria
● Should have strong links with any **local printed news** (including any council newsletter or newspaper)

Extract from *Better connected: aiming high*

Context
Local news value is an important feature of any local authority website, because that is what helps to link local people together. There are many aspects of news value that should be considered ranging from straightforward local news stories that have an impact on the local community to national, or even international stories that have a local angle or connection. In many councils the local authority will be the originator of the news story (eg a local planning issue) or the organiser of some local event.

Whatever the reason, the home page should seem lively, engaging and in touch with local stories. It sets the tone for a website that is both up to date and topical, drawing visitors into other information and services.

Special survey

In the period from 9 to 16 January 2006 we carried out a special survey on the news value of the home page of over half of all local authority websites. The sites selected were those who have been rated as C+ or T sites (in total we examined 304 sites) and we used a separate set of questions focused on news value:

N1   Does site present council decisions, events, activities and projects as a news service (this might be in news section, not just home page)?

N2   Does site promote news value with a lively, dynamic home page (eg links to current press releases)?

N3   Does site build on the sense of the local community with local news stories (ie non-council news) accessible from the home page?

N4   Does site link up with important local events (eg arts events, charity runs) even if they are only loosely connected with the local authority ('What's on?' pages also checked)?

N5   Does site have strong links with local printed news (including any council newsletter or newspaper)?

Analysis
Last year we tracked a significant improvement in the development of home pages that have strong news value as defined by our survey. That improvement has been maintained in the answers to the same five questions. 88% of sites are now rated very good in this respect compared with 64% last year. The question that led to the greatest improvement was the final one about links with local printed news (from 50% last year to 63% this year).

Although many sites did have links to printed news or local newspapers, the best were those that clearly identified these links within the news page (eg Gloucestershire CC, Cotswold DC). If a visitor is looking for news or a particular article, this would be extremely useful.

Some general trends that become apparent include sites where:

● councils are beginning to link news and events

● some are categorising the news into council, community and individual services such as planning
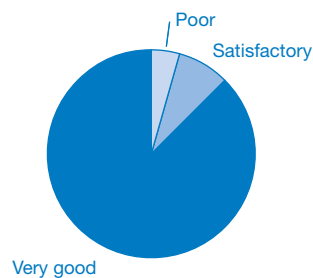
Chart 27a Summary of news value
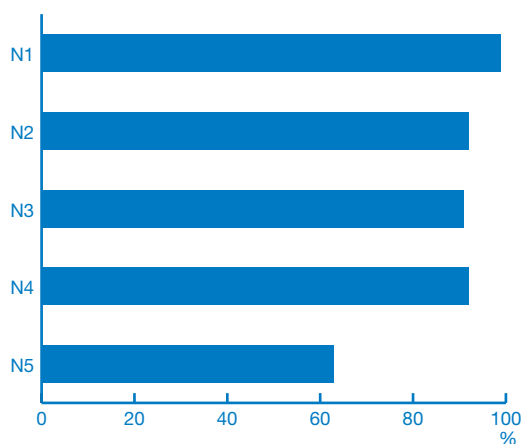
Chart 27b Analysis of news value

Key messages

- **Review the news value of your website using our criteria.**

- **Ensure the right level of news specialist contribution to your website.**

- **Aim to engage citizens with a lively and dynamic home page.**

- **Link up with local sources of news (eg BBCI, local newspapers).**

- **Be prepared for local emergencies (eg major explosions).**

Further information: See Appendix 1 for results of survey

If subscriber, visit *How did your council do?*, the subscriber-only area of www.socitm.gov.uk

- most sites are using news releases to add life to their home pages

- others had links to individual news items on the home page but no link to any news archive pages

- some are starting to use multimedia as part of the news service

- others showed news as part of a lively and dynamic home page, but required the visitor to scroll down to the news items.

Opposite we feature the response to the Buncefield explosion on 13 December 2005 by council websites in the locality. All councils should reflect on how well they would handle the impact of such a disaster in terms of the coverage on their websites. This incident also highlights the need for councils to include the web team in any emergency planning scenarios in order to ensure that the website gets updated in a timely fashion in such an eventuality.

✔ **Basildon DC**
The home page not only promotes news within the council sections of the site (eg planning) but also lists press releases, and links to local media, UK and world news.

✔ **Crawley BC**
This is an example of a council that sees local news and events as synonymous and giving them equal prominence on the home page and so deals with them in a single section 'News and Events'.

✔ **Colchester BC**
The website encourages people to sign up for e-news, which is very useful when they are wanting to hear of emergency information that might impact services.

✔ **West Dunbartonshire**
Here visitors can add their own news item after a registration process.

The Buncefield oil explosion

At around 8am on Sunday 13 December a major oil explosion took place near Hemel Hempstead in Hertfordshire. This was a national headline story for a few days. How did local authorities in the area handle the story? Both the district council (Dacorum DC) and the county council (Hertfordshire CC) had during the morning posted the news on their sites with an outline on the impact on their services (housing repairs and school and library closures respectively), although interestingly not apparently for each other's services. This was extremely responsive and contrasted with another neighbouring council (Luton BC) where the explosion might well have had serious travel impacts (M1 and Luton Airport), but whose website made no reference at all to the disaster on its home page. It also contrasted with the total lack of news information on the Directgov portal whose 'Newsroom' and 'Public safety' pages were blissfully unaware of what had happened.

Hertfordshire CC home page

Dacorum BC home page

4.7 Transactions

Can people transact business with the council?

Source of evidence: Main survey

Evidence of success

Essential criteria
- Should provide **all services that are capable** of being enabled electronically

- Should make available **electronic versions of all forms used** (Note: the website is an ideal repository of infrequently used forms and avoids individual offices having to maintain stocks of a high number of forms that are rarely used.)

- Should show a **list of all transactions and services** available

Extract from *Better connected: aiming high*

Context

The council website is becoming increasingly focused on providing interactive services to the public. This trend affects a very wide range of services delivered to a wide range of citizens and customers. It has been very much driven by the need to meet the Government's 2005 targets for all public services that can be put online to be made available in this form, and in England by the policy on priority service outcomes.

Our three scenarios contain five questions designed to test for transactional features and our theme on participation has two further transactional questions. In order to assess the growth in transactions, we have expanded this part of the survey by adding nine extra questions to the seven questions from the three scenarios, giving in total a set of sixteen questions designed to assess interactive applications. They also include a number of questions designed to test the indicators for the priority service outcomes policy (England only).

Questions

Q6 Can I make a complaint online about a licensed premise? (Keywords: complain, problem, pub, wine bar)

Q15 Can I apply online for a school place? (Keywords: school place, application)

Q16 Can I pay for school meals online? (Keywords: school meals, payment)

Q21 Can I register to receive job vacancies of interest to me by e-mail? (Keyword: job vacancies, e-mail alerts)

Q23 Can I apply for a job using an online form? (Keywords: online application)

Q27 Can I reserve or renew a library book? (Keywords: library book, reservation, renewal)

Q28 Can I request an appointment with a social worker online? (Keywords: appointment, social worker)

Q29 Can I request to receive my council tax bill electronically? (Keywords: council tax bill)

Q30 Does a search for 'pothole' lead to information about how to report one to the council (or tell you which authority is responsible for dealing with potholes)?

Q31 Can I report a pothole online? (Keyword: pothole)

Q32 Does a search on 'planning office' lead to contact details for the planning department?

Q33 Can I search the planning register online? (Keywords: planning information, planning register)

Q34 Can I submit a response to tender online? (Keywords: tenders, tender opportunities)

Q35 Can I apply online to be considered for the council's approved list of suppliers? (Keywords: approved supplier)

Q38 Can external organisations submit new or revised information online for the community database? (not 'what's on') (Keywords: community information, update, clubs, groups)

Q40 Is there evidence that the website is used to conduct online consultations? (Keyword: consultation)
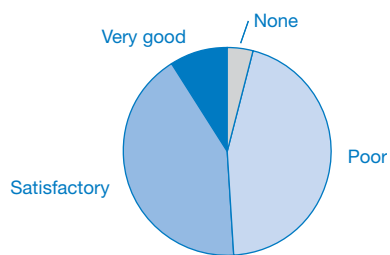
Chart 28a Summary of transactions
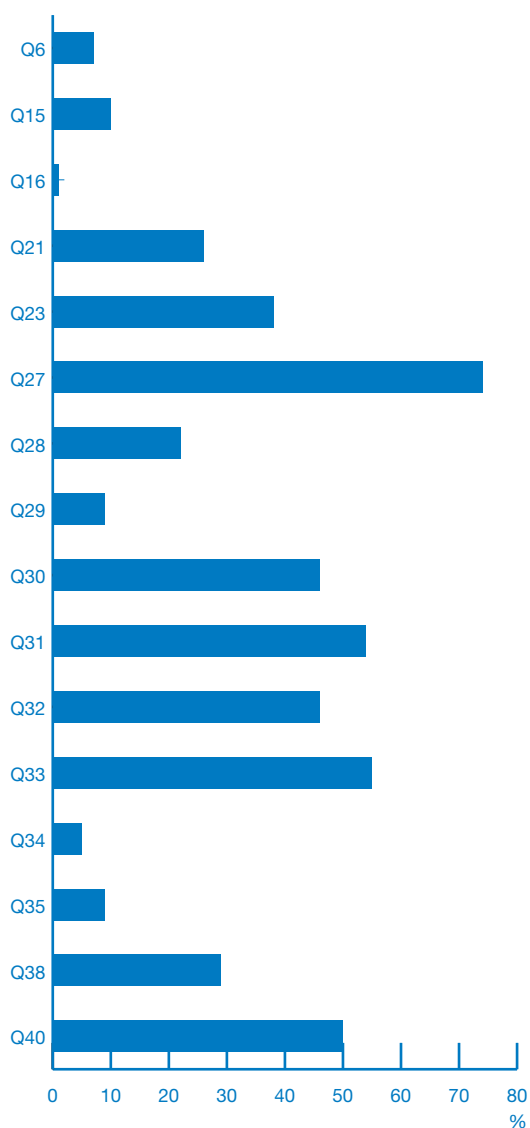
Chart 28b Analysis of transactions

Analysis

The theme of transactions comprised sixteen questions in total, some related to other scenarios and themes already analysed. The first of these originates in Scenario 1 (section 4.2). Just 7% of websites have the facility to make a complaint about a licensed premise. Public awareness of licensing laws has increased dramatically in the past six months as a result of the Licensing Act 2003, which was fully implemented in November 2005. Local authorities should now plan to implement online complaints as one of the natural later stages in the implementation of the Act.

The next two questions relate to Scenario 2 (section 4.3). Both applications (online school admissions and online payments for school meals) have been very successful in the small numbers of education authorities where they have been implemented. All other education authorities should move as quickly as possible to make these transactions available in the next twelve months.

Scenario 3 (section 4.4) provides the next pair of questions about job applications. Last year we asked whether council websites allowed people to apply for jobs online and 42% did. Now our questions checked for more advanced facilities. Firstly, we found out that 26% offer an e-mail alert service to those registering for such a service. Secondly, we discovered that 38% now allow candidates to apply online, by which we mean completion of the form online right through to online submission of the final application. Given the high level of interest in online enquiries about job vacancies, it makes good sense to make the task as online as possible. The next step will be to carry out part of the screening of job applications received (eg online aptitude tests).

The first of our additional questions about transactions concerns the library service and is very familiar to our surveys. Over three-quarters of the councils now offer this facility, compared with just over half last year. This was one of the first interactive applications that local authorities put on their websites. 135 out of 150 councils with library services in England (89%) offer the facility and in Wales and Scotland 36 councils out of 54 (67%) do so. A large number of shire districts (69), which do not run libraries, join up with their county websites and six districts in Northern Ireland also link direct to the province-wide library service.

The next question tested the facility for requesting an appointment with a social worker online. We allowed cases where a general e-mail address was provided, but only if the visitor was encouraged to use it to request an appointment. Just over one in five councils offers this (22%), including 77 shire districts that point to the county facility.

One question repeated from last year is the ability to request the electronic receipt of a council tax bill. Last year just 10 councils offered this, but this year the numbers have risen to 41 (9%).

Providing the means to report road and street problems is a very efficient method of dealing with local authorities. This year we selected potholes as a transaction to test. First of all, we also used this as a way of testing search engines, because it is not always easy to know which part of the website to go to, or even which council website to go to. Just under half of council websites (46%) can deal with this enquiry. Slightly more (54%) offer the facility for online reporting.

We carried out a similar test for searching online planning registers. To find this facility we tested the search engine with the phrase 'planning office' and found again that 46% of websites came up with the right answer. When it comes to being able to search the register, once found, then 55% of websites allow this to be done online, including 16 out of 34 county councils that give links to districts in their areas.

The next two questions relate to the world of business and test two parts of the process of tendering for work. Both come out with very low scores, given the growing dependence of business on ICT and the promotion of the single business account in the 'Working with business' national project. Just 5% allow online responses to tenders and 9% allow online applications to be considered for the council's approved list of suppliers, even if we count as valid e-mail addresses that are used specifically for this purpose.

Finally, we asked two questions from our theme on participation (see section 4.9). Nearly three councils in ten allow external organisations to submit new or revised information online for a community database, and one in two councils shows evidence that the website is used to conduct online consultations.

Summary of transactions

Type	Avge	None	1>3	4>7	8 +
Shire counties	6.18	0	2	23	9
London boroughs*	5.24	0	5	25	2
Metropolitan districts	4.83	0	9	25	2
English unitaries	4.74	0	13	32	2
Shire districts	3.64	7	106	118	7
Scottish unitaries	2.97	3	15	14	0
Welsh unitaries	2.59	1	15	6	0
NI districts	0.88	11	15	0	0
Total	**3.89**	**22**	**180**	**243**	**22**

* excludes one unclassified entry

Chart 29 Common transactions by type of local authority

Using the questions listed in this section (but not questions 30 and 32, which test search engines rather than transactions), we can profile the scale of transactions by type of authority.

From this table we can observe that:

● The number of councils with no transactions is less than 10% (two-thirds of which are outside England).

● Councils in England are, in general, making much more progress than those in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. This reflects the much greater proactive approach in England which is supported by major government funding.

● Twenty-two councils in England have recorded more than eight transactions (out of 14 tested). The four highest have 11 or more (all shire counties).

● In fact, according to this test counties are now more interactive than other types and have overtaken London boroughs and metropolitan districts, which led the way in a similar test last year.

We should not forget, however, that the number of transactions identified in this report relates to the questions specifically asked in the survey. Websites generally have much higher numbers of transactions than those in this test.

Example of good practice
(ie all those rated very good and at least nine of sixteen 'Yes' answers recorded)

- Brent
- Devon CC
- Hillingdon
- Isle of Wight
- Kirklees MBC
- Lincolnshire CC
- Reigate & Banstead BC
- Shrewsbury & Atcham BC
- Shropshire CC
- Suffolk CC
- Surrey CC
- Wiltshire CC
- Woking BC

Key messages

- **Do not assume that just making transactions available will of itself create a transactional site according to our ranking system.**

- **Ensure that sites are customer-focused in their whole design and approach as well as increasing the number of transactions available.**

- **Concentrate on the most frequently used transactions; in particular ensure that your site supports online job applications.**

Further information: See Appendix 1 for results of survey

If subscriber, visit *How did your council do?*, the subscriber-only area of www.socitm.gov.uk

✔ **Canterbury BC**
Lots of good transactions on this site as well as links into the county council transactions. I liked the live online car parking indicator which tells you how many parking spaces are vacant in all the car parks in Canterbury — brilliant.

✔ **Carmarthenshire CC**
There are lots of transactions on this site that are well presented and easy to use, including forms, service requests, databases that can be searched. The 'your nearest' facility is very good and easy to use and covers a huge range of services and facilities. The online planning register is really great. You can search it by postcode, date range and other criteria and view all kinds of document and drawings. Really easy to use.

✔ **Clackmannanshire**
'My Clacksweb' enables registered uses to receive updates, to have online forms pre filled, to save messages from the website and other useful features.

✔ **Cotswold DC**
This website has a wide range of transactions that appear to be easy to use, effective and are integrated into the web pages. They are all listed on an 'online services' page and there seem to be links to these online services from relevant pages throughout the site.

✔ **Hammersmith and Fulham**
Neat touch that people have the opportunity to pay for grave maintenance fees online via the website. A real boon for a descendant living overseas, or even just a hundred miles away.

✔ **Lincolnshire CC**
The 'Do it Online' section was very comprehensive and well organised as an A to Z with a clear description of the service available.

✔ **Stroud DC**
Lots of very useful and well presented transactions and online services on this website. I liked the e-mail alerts service which has a wide range of services that you can receive updates about.

✔ **Merthyr Tydfil CBC**
I love the library pages on this website. They're really interesting, extensive and very up to date. There's a book-of-the-month page with reviews and this includes a link to the online catalogue so users can check to see if the book is available to borrow — a really simple idea, but a very good way to encourage people to use the online catalogue.

4.8 E-mail

Can people do business by e-mail with the council?

Source of evidence: Special survey by team member

Essential criteria

- Should have **e-mail addresses** and **online contact forms** at or near the **home page** for:

  - general council helpdesk

  - complaints with an explanation of the process

  - web team for comments/corrections/ questions about the site

- Should have e-mail addresses that are **explicitly stated** on screen rather than hidden behind a text link

- Should be a generic **address for each service area** (rather than addresses for individual councillors or officers)

- Should have an individual '.gov.uk' address for each **councillor**: it is not sufficient to have the address of an intermediary such as a committee clerk

- Should have **clearly defined** e-mail service in terms of time to reply and quality of reply response and the standards should be at least the same as postal or telephone enquiries.

Desirable criteria

- Should generate for **enquiries** an acknowledgement and notification of any forwarding address and when to expect a reply with a unique reference number allocated to allow tracking of enquiry

Extract from ***Better connected: aiming high***

Context

A natural development from the providision of information is the provision of services. The first and simplest form of service is to do business by e-mail. The website should actively encourage the use of e-mail as a two-way communication medium with the general public. This might include enabling citizens to register to receive regular news bulletins or notifications of changes in services via e-mail.

Methodology

We looked at every council website and found a contact form or an e-mail address to which to send the question. This was the question:

After a clear-out I have a large number of bags of files and paper (maybe 30 to 40). What is the best way of disposing of this? Do I have to make special arrangements for this to be picked up?

The process we went through to send this e-mail included the following steps:

- When sending the e-mail, we tried each site three times.

- If the e-mail was rejected, we checked the e-mail address and, if it was correct, we did not resend.

- We sent the e-mail to a general e-mail address or enquiry form.

- If there was no general contact point, we looked in the A to Z list of services under recycling, rubbish or waste.

- If neither of these options was successful, we sent the e-mail to the chief executive.

In analysing the results, we calculated the number of days to receive an acknowledgement, if one was sent prior to the full reply. We calculated the number of days to receive a reply, irrespective of whether an acknowledgement was received. In both date calculations, we counted only working days.

We classified all replies as:

0 for no reply (or, in one case, not possible to send e-mail)

1 for poor reply

2 for satisfactory reply

3 for very good reply

We automatically gave a 1 (poor reply) if there were no telephone or website addresses in the answer, whatever else the reply contained, because this severely limits its usefulness.
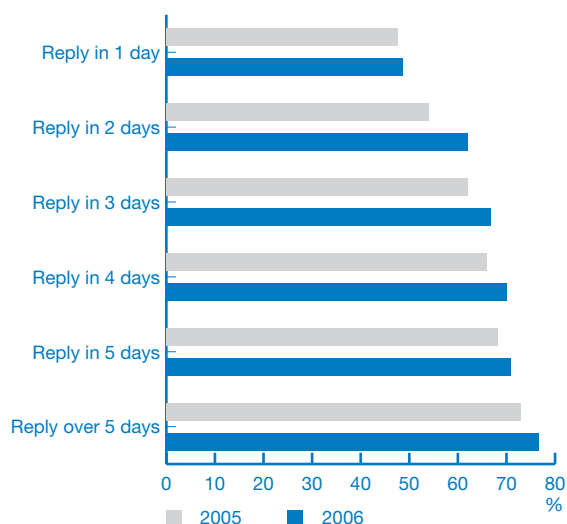
Chart 30a Replies to e-mail enquiry (time to reply)

- 33% (156) of those that received an e-mail sent an initial acknowledgment, but only 81% of those followed up with a reply. Acknowledgements set expectations that replies will follow, but in practice the performance is only slightly better than where no acknowledgements are sent.

- Out of 119 that provided a form, 20 used a tracking number, which might imply a more professional response, but the profile of responses was no different (eg six did not reply).

Analysis of quality of reply
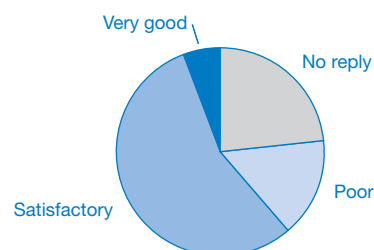
Chart 30c Replies to e-mail enquiry (quality of reply)

The question is not as straightforward to answer as it might appear, because it encompasses several different points:

- Is it residential or business waste? Businesses generally have to pay.

- Should the waste be shredded or not?

- Should the waste be recycled or put in landfill?

- Are the files paper or ring binders? If they are ring binders, then they have to be removed before the paper can be recycled.

- Is it free or do you pay? The best answers offered both options.

The main points about the quality of the reply include:

- Just over one in five councils failed this test (21% of those that did reply), pointing quite clearly to the need for some training in the way in which e-mails should be handled. No doubt many of the criticisms here would apply to all forms of communication, but e-mail does encourage a different approach with its immediacy and informality.

- Those that were assessed as poor were generally ones that did not provide a viable solution and also did not provide any officer contact details with the e-mail.

Chart 30b Acknowledgements of e-mail

Analysis of speed of response

We monitored both the time it took to reply and the quality of the reply. In assessing the time to reply, we compared the results with results from last year's e-mail test when we asked the question:

I am interested in tracing my family history. I wonder if there are any organizations in the area which may be able to help me, whether you have any historical records I can use for my research and also how I can obtain historical birth certificates. Is this something I can buy online?

The results are a small improvement from last year's performance, although that dipped from the previous year:

- 59.8% of all local authorities responded to our e-mail within one working day compared with last year's 47.6% (and 67.5% before that).

- 77% of those who received an e-mail responded within ten days compared with 70% last year and 80% the year before.

- 67% of those who received an e-mail responded within three days compared with 60% last year and 74% the year before.

- Compared with last year, the quality of the replies did register a small improvement (8% more registering a satisfactory or very good answer), although we have to remember that they are two very different questions.

- There was a huge variance in the replies with very few councils addressing all these points. Those that did and gave the most options received the assessment of being very good.

- On the other hand, extremely full and lengthy replies also may be too complex to be helpful, or give the impression that the employee's time might have been wasted. We received one with over 500 words that gave that impression.

- Generally the reply was assessed as satisfactory if it offered a solution to the problem even if it was simply 'take it to the tip' or 'we will pick it up for £xx'. The variability of the response may reflect the variability of the service or just the quality of the e-mail reply. For example, if one is offered just a paying option, is this an incomplete reply because the rubbish can be taken for free to the recycling centre or tip, or is this the only service available in the area?

- Relatively few councils included links to their own websites where much of this information on recycling and bulky waste collection can be found.

- Replies from shire counties were assessed as satisfactory if they passed the question on to the districts. Some counties gave a helpful answer and others the bare minimum.

- Responses from general staff in contact centres seemed to be inferior to those which were passed to the recycling officers who unsurprisingly showed a greater expertise and awareness of the issues.

✔ **Kirklees MBC**
Your correspondence has been sent successfully and has been allocated reference number frontline-1032906.

Enter your mobile phone number in the box below to send this reference number to your phone via a SMS text message.

✔ **Reading BC**
This facility is intelligent enough to know that the visitor only has to leave an e-mail address if only an e-mail response is required. It does not, therefore, force the visitor to leave a name and address.

✗ **Too rigorous validation**
Think about what validation you really need. For example, as one council validates every field, the visitor has to fill in three address lines, even though this may be unnecessary.

Another example is a site that will not let the visitor fill out a form without a daytime landline number, not a mobile number. What if the visitor works in a job where no landline number can be used?

✗ **Poor validation**
One council replied to say 'Sorry your form was not sent due to errors' but does not state which errors!

✗ **Lack of co-ordination**
One council gave two answers on the same day, one from 'Enquiries' and one from 'Environmental services'. Together they provide a very comprehensive answer, but the repetition is a waste of resources.

Another council sent two acknowledgements, one automated and the other a personal one. Again, a waste of resources.

Three others sent two acknowledgements, but did not later reply to the query.

✗ **Unhelpful replies**
One council gave two answers.

Another replied with spelling mistakes.

The reply from a third was anonymous and a fourth offered a full legal disclaimer before the reply.

E-mail etiquette for public service replies

- Make sure you put an e-mail address with your contact details on the website.

- Do not use fancy fonts or coloured background when sending e-mails to the public. Use a standard font which is easy to read.

- Make sure you sign the e-mail with full contact details. Otherwise, it seems unfriendly and anonymous. The name of a person is more friendly than a function, eg Reception.

- Do not just pass the enquiry on to another part of the council, eg one council sent two e-mail acknowledgements without sending the proper reply that was promised.

- If someone contacts you by e-mail, include links in the reply rather than just postal addresses.

- If you can, look where the enquiry is from. If the e-mail is from abroad (eg questions about family history), do not assume that the customer knows what a directory enquiry is or that he or she can pop into your office.

- Check that your general enquiry form works properly.

- Take care that any validation is really needed (eg do not ask for pieces of information that are not used).

- Track replies properly. Several councils sent two answers!

- Track acknowledgements by ensuring that they do lead to proper replies.

- If you recommend a website, give the website address and make sure that the link works.

- Be friendly and positive — little touches like 'good luck' make the reply seem warm and helpful — and focus on what you can do, not what you can't.

- Use the spellchecker in the reply.

- Read the question and answer all of it — many councils only answered part of the question.

- Requests by e-mail should be answered wherever possible by an e-mail reply rather than just being told to call a telephone number. If someone had wanted to call, that person would have done so in the first place.

- If relevant, answer the request by giving the visitor a link to the website for the information, but do ensure that the link works.

- Make sure that people can find where to e-mail easily. It took up to 15 minutes to find an e-mail address on some websites.

- Make sure that you give full contact details of all organisations you recommend.

- 'Go the extra mile' instead of just telling the customer the name of the relevant office, forward the query and ask that office to reply on the customer's behalf.

- Finally, do reply quickly, anything over 3 days just feels too long for e-mails.

Examples of good practice
(ie all those who replied with an answer rated very good)

- Adur DC
- Barnet
- Berwick-upon-Tweed BC
- Bexley
- Blaby DC
- Blackburn with Darwen BC
- Broadland DC
- Camden (very good reply also in last year's test)
- Canterbury City
- Ceredigion CC
- Cheshire CC
- Chorley BC
- Cornwall CC

- Dartford BC
- Denbighshire CC (very good reply also in last year's test)
- Derbyshire CC (very good reply also in last year's test)
- Dorset CC
- Elmbridge BC
- Epsom & Ewell BC
- Lincolnshire CC (very good reply also in last year's test)
- North East Lincolnshire
- Slough BC (very good reply also in last year's test)
- South Northamptonshire DC
- Tonbridge & Malling BC
- Watford BC
- Wealden DC

Model answers

Dartford BC (commendably brief)
Assuming the sacks contain just paper and cardboard, they can be put out for collection as recyclables on a Monday — if the bags are not clear, you'll need to label them so the crews don't assume they're normal rubbish.

If the bags are more rubbish than recyclables, you could either take them to the household waste site in Rochester Way, Dartford Heath yourself, or pay us to collect them from you — the charge would be £25.

Please let me know what you want to do.

Dorset CC (excellent joining up by county)
I would suggest that the best way of disposing of your paper would be to recycle it. Each of the district/borough councils in Dorset operates its own scheme for kerbside recycling. Information from each partner authority can be found on our joint website at www.dorsetforyou.com/index.jsp?articleid=157364 (your district/borough council is the one to which you pay your council tax).

If this is unsuitable, you could take the paper to one of the paper recycling facilities in Dorset.

These can be found at either the Household Recycling Centres (www.dorsetforyou.com/index.jsp?articleid=3164) or in one of the mini recycling centres (www.dorsetforyou.com/index.jsp?articleid=3165).

Any other rubbish can be collected in the usual way from your doorstep. This is normally collected weekly, and details of each district/borough's collection dates can be found on our website: www.dorsetforyou.com/index.jsp?articleid=157360

East Dorset and Christchurch provide 'pdfs' listing the dates, West Dorset provides an online street/village checker (www.dorsetforyou.com/index.jsp?articleid=357).

I hope that this helps with your query — please contact us again should you have any more questions by e-mailing webteam@dorsetcc.gov.uk.

Key messages

- **Provide an e-mail address and contact form for general enquiries, available on or near the home page.**

- **Do not make e-mails as formal as a printed letter, but still give a minimum standard information, eg:**

  - **name and title of the person responding**

  - **organisation name, a telephone number and the website address.**

- **Ensure that employees are aware of the content of the website and that they direct people to relevant pages, where helpful.**

- **Test out the full system to ensure that visitors received timely and relevant replies and that the process does not have flaws, eg through lack of coordination.**

- **Put a system in place to ensure that e-mail correspondence is handled properly and quality and speed of response is monitored, taking into account the etiquette suggested here.**

- **Consider training in handling e-mail for all employees as part of general communications skills.**

- **Make sure that people in contact centres give as good a service in terms of the quality of the reply as those in the specialist functions on whose behalf they answer questions.**

Further information: See Appendix 1 for results of survey

If subscriber, visit *How did your council do?*, the subscriber-only area of www.socitm.gov.uk

4.9 Participation

Do people have the opportunity to influence council policies and decisions?

Sources of evidence: Main survey
Special survey on
discussion forums by
team member

Evidence of success

Essential criteria

- Should provide **ready access to public information** such as committee documents, meeting schedules, councillor information, key policies and plans

- Should invite **feedback** on quality of services, not just in general, but also for each major service, and provide evidence of **responding to comments** (eg service improvements)

- Should provide **full contact details** (eg phone number and address as well as e-mail address for both general comments and service-related comments)

- Should enable registration of **complaints** and support this with full details of the **formal process** (eg next steps, how to appeal, go to Ombudsman)

- Should offer within the site a **single point of access** to a full range of supporting information on topics of local importance

- Should support **debate and consultation on specific local issues** with reporting back on outcomes, explaining decision-making processes and timetables

- Should show the **actual results or impact resulting from political debate and review**, to illustrate that electronic participation has made a difference

Desirable criteria

- Should regularly hold **discussion forums** on local issues (eg plans and proposals, and run them with proper support and moderation

- Should provide facilities for community groups and individuals to **comment on issues and services**

Extract from *Better connected: aiming high*

✔ **Brent**
Consultation information well presented, especially results. 'View by' selection is a neat touch. Well done!

✔ **Cannock Chase DC**
There is an online opinion poll on the home page — a great way to engage with, and get feedback from the public, with live results immediately available.

✔ **Cumbria CC**
Very good on online consultation, including reports on past exercises, and there is also an online discussion forum.

✔ **Salford City**
Some councillors have provided extra information on the Councillor Info page. The level and depth of consultation information is also great.

Context

For many citizens, participation in the democratic process and engaging with their local council is limited to casting their vote on election day. For a majority of the population, even this has become too much of an effort, as turnout at local elections has become worryingly low.

It is, therefore, important for society to find ways of increasing engagement between citizens and their councils. New technologies and their increasing acceptance mean that the internet should be part of any communications strategy and the web is increasingly seen as a vital communications tool. Websites have the potential, however, not only to communicate to citizens but also to encourage that essential participation, whether it be via a simple online feedback form or via a multi-level consultation on complex issues.

Questions

Q39 Can I access a personal web page for my local councillor? (Keyword: councillor)

Q40 Is there evidence that the website is used to conduct online consultations? (Keyword: consultation)

Q41 Can I see the results of any consultations? (Keyword: consultation results)

D1 Does the website have an open, public discussion forum?

Chart 31a Summary of participation
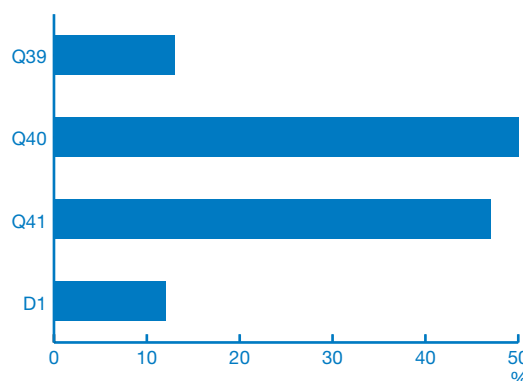
Chart 31b Analysis of participation

Analysis

The first question under this theme concerns personal web pages for councillors. We counted a 'Yes' answer if any three councillors chosen at random had such a page. Just 59 councils (13%) had examples of personal pages according to this selection method.

The next two questions concern the use of online consultations. Exactly one in two councils has online consultations. This excludes online polls or e-panels but includes cases where a well-presented document encourages people to send an e-mail as consultation.

In our next question about evidence of results of consultation (whether online or not) we found that 47% of councils had such evidence. However, as this included 61% of those with online consultations, it means that in the remaining 39% of cases the results related to some earlier consultation.

The final test of participation being encouraged on websites came from the supplementary survey of discussion forums. Here in the main survey we only show the answer to the question which is the natural starting point — just 50 websites (11%) show the evidence of a discussion forum. The supplementary questions about discussion forums are shown below and a more detailed analysis of the responses is given overleaf.

Examples of good practice

(ie all those rated very good and with all four questions answered)

- Devon CC

- Borough of Poole

Discussion forums

D1   Does the website have an open, public discussion forum?

D2   Is the forum specialised? (eg for young people)

D3   If specialised, please indicate in what way

D4   Is it easy to understand how to use it?

D5   Are there two or more postings from the last two weeks?

D6   Is the forum pre-moderated?

D7   What is the moderation policy?

D8   Is there any evidence of irrelevant or undesirable postings?
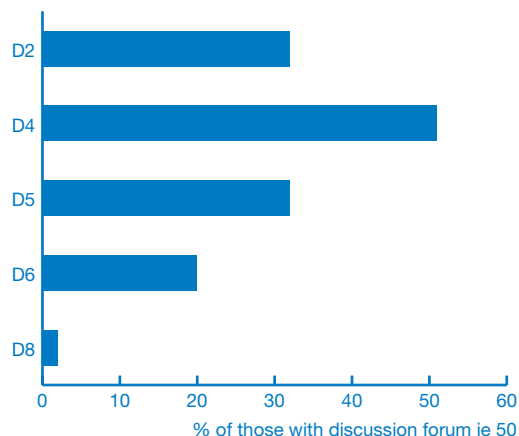
Chart 32 Analysis of discussion forums

Analysis

For the first time we carried out a special supplementary survey this year on the practice of online discussion forums.

We found that just 11% of council websites (50 sites) featured some kind of online discussion forum. This low figure did not count online consultation on particular documents where comments could be sent in, and sometimes published on the site. Nor did it count discussion forums that were only open to particular groups of people, whether internal or external. We did, however, count any online debate of discussion forums that were open to everyone to use, with the results viewable by everyone.

In looking for discussion forums, we looked at every home page for links to a forum, and then checked, by using the site search engine, the A to Z list and any online services and consultation sections.

Of the 50 forums found, 70% (35 sites) were general forums, where any topic could be discussed. The remaining 30 per cent (15 sites) were specialised forums, covering five examples of youth issues and three examples of environment issues including waste development and regional planning. Other examples included 'silver surfers', rural matters, arts and libraries, town centre issues, police, community plans and schools.

With the majority of forums, it is relatively easy to understand how to register and post comments on to them: we rated 31 out of 50 as easy to understand.

Apart from the low numbers of forums, the most regrettable finding of the survey was that most are dead or out of date: just 16 forums found had two or more messages posted within the two weeks preceding the mid-January 2006 review date. Many forums had run for a period of time last year, or even two or three years ago, and then been closed down or had dried up. Examples of dead or empty sites include Barnsley MBC, Stafford BC and the South Norfolk youth forum.

In terms of forum moderation, just six of the 50 forums found made it clear that they were pre-moderated: there may have been more that were pre-moderated, but did not say so. Pre-moderation occurs where postings only appear on the forum after they have been read and approved by a forum moderator at the council.

This means that, perhaps surprisingly, most forums were open for free posting, albeit they were usually post-moderated, ie policed after the event for inappropriate postings, which would then be removed.

No obscene or undesirable postings were found on any of the council forums, whether pre- or post-moderated, although Staffordshire's forum had a few blank or minimal postings that were not much use.

Examples of good practice
(ie all those with a 'live' discussion forum)

- Allerdale BC
- Chester City
- Derwentside DC
- Guildford BC
- Isle of Wight
- Islington
- Kent CC
- Nuneaton & Bedworth BC

- Sandwell MBC
- Shrewsbury & Atcham BC
- South Kesteven DC
- Southwark
- Swale BC
- Wear Valley DC
- West Dunbartonshire
- Woking BC

✔ **Swale BC**
Example of pre-moderation policy
"This forum is for users to share information or raise any issue that they would like us to cover on the web pages. The forum will be checked on a daily basis and we will attempt to come back on any issues raised promptly. Please note: Your message will need to be approved by the moderator before it appears on the forum."

✔ **Swale BC**
The discussion forum seems very widely used and up to date. I wonder to what extent it is moderated. I was very amused to read the string about refuse collectors and whether or not they can be bribed to take an extra bag of rubbish from householders! I'm delighted to see that this discussion hasn't been sanitised by the moderator — it makes the discussion much more compelling — well done!

✔ **Chester City**
Example of post-moderation policy
"This Forum is made freely available for use. We ask that users act responsibly when posting or replying to messages. Any continued misuse of the Forum will result in the user being banned. Misuse of the Forum includes swearing, libellous comments, abusive posts, spamming, insulting behaviour and any other behaviour deemed unacceptable by the Forum's administrators. If you feel there is a post that is offensive in any way, please contact a member of the Forum Administration team or e-mail webmaster@chester.gov.uk and action will be taken as soon as possible. If you are banned, you have the right to request the administrators reconsider their actions."

✔ **Highland Council**
Overall, one of the most notable examples of best practice with the format of online forums is Highland Council's sub-site entitled 'thinknet', an 'incubator of ideas' which features discussion forums, as well as background papers and news to stimulate debate. (www.think-net.org)

Key messages

- Do not overlook the internet as a powerful communications tool for engaging with citizens, because its reach and interactive nature make it an ideal medium for encouraging participation.

- Where consultation is carried out on the web, ensure that respondents can send feedback online.

- Make results of the consultation available online to encourage more participation.

- Where possible, show the timetable for future consultations, results and decisions.

- Ensure that online consultation is well signposted from the home page and has a relevant title.

- Encourage councillors to use personal web pages as a way of communicating with their constituents.

- Consider the use of discussion forums, but ensure that they are easy to use and that the rules of engagement are clear.

Further information: See Appendix 1 for results of survey

If subscriber, visit *How did your council do?*, the subscriber-only area of **www.socitm.gov.uk**

Part D

This year's results — usability

The second stage of the results focuses on ease of use. This covers ease of finding, use of navigational aids such as A to Z lists, search engines and locational data, general navigation, accessibility, readability and, finally, technical resilience.

5 Usability

5.1 Ease of finding

Can people find the site easily?

Source of evidence: Directgov portal

Evidence of success

Essential criteria

- Should have **name of website** that is immediately obvious (subject to the constraints of the local authority name itself) and intuitive to find

- Should have **all reasonable alternative names** of the website that point to the right website

- Should ensure that **names of main towns** in the local authority area (or other such names of localities) lead search engines to the right website

- Should ensure that **portals** covering the locality point immediately to the right website

Desirable criteria

- Should ensure that **names of prominent features** (eg famous landmarks) in the website also lead search engines straight to the right website

Context

The first step in being able to use a site is being able to find it. Most visitors to local authority websites are unlikely to be familiar with website addresses for local authorities, and some local authority names are quite different from the largest towns within them. Search engines such as Google should identify the right 'urls', if you enter any reasonable place name.

Analysis

Two years ago, we commented on the 'urls' in use, as not all local authority names are immediately obvious and not all 'urls' are intuitive forms of the local authority name. A small minority of 'urls' are, arguably, not as easy to work out as they might be.

Since then some 24 councils have changed the name of their main 'url', the most common reason to change being to remove 'bc ', 'cc' or 'dc' as a suffix to main name.

Last year we tested how easily council websites came up from Google searches and found that local government passed this test very well. We also gave some technical advice about improving the indexability of content for search engines.

Metadata

One of the SiteMorse tests concerns the use of metadata, specifically the entries for title, keywords and brief description for the home page. 356 councils (76%) had entered all three items correctly compared with 294 councils (64%) last year. This is a modest improvement over 2005, given that it is such a simple thing to put right. Use of metadata here does ensure that sites that are picked up are properly described in the listing of the search results. Those that fail this test have no excuse for not doing this.

The Directgov connection

This year, we have seen a significant step being taken in making it easier to find a council website. In England the links from the Directgov portal have improved considerably. Visitors who now land at www.direct.gov.uk no longer need to know the name of the right local authority in order to find a specific service whereas previously they did. By submitting a postcode after identifying the service, Directgov works out the right local authority name and also the right deep link for handling the service at that specific council website.

This has been achieved by local authorities specifying to the ODPM's Local Directgov team the list of 'urls' for each of 65 services in Phase 1 of this exercise (to be followed by another 175 in Phase 2). There is no doubt that this is a major step in the joining up of government. As the facility was launched as recently as 17 January 2006, only time will tell how many extra visitors are directed to local authority websites as a result of this initiative.

This set of links has to be maintained by local authorities. Time will also tell how well this task will be managed.

This facility only works at the current time for England. The Directgov page from which the facility operates does say this, but, when a valid Scottish or Welsh postcode is submitted, it is rejected as invalid, rather than being out of England. If the visitor has not noticed the reference to 'England only', then it may be puzzling to receive that message rather than the more helpful explanation that the option does not work for Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. The solution to that problem will be to bring the Directgov connection into the whole of the UK, but this can only be brought about at the political level through the devolved administrations.

Finally, it seems strange to have a sophisticated link from Directgov to the council and yet have no reference to a link from the council to Directgov. We have already commented that 29 council sites in England do not yet appear to have the link in the other direction. There is, in fact, a strong case for doing more than just linking from the home page but to link to Directgov from many other pages on the site. Councils might then add value to their website by pointing visitors to Directgov where this fills gaps in the council website (eg renewing car tax online, finding local health services).

Key messages

● **Make sure that the links with Directgov are maintained in both directions.**

● **Check that the metadata tags for title, key words and description are present and correct.**

Further information: See Appendix 11 for metadata test (SiteMorse)

If subscriber, visit *How did your council do?*, the subscriber-only area of www.socitm.gov.uk

5.2   Use of A to Z list

Can people find their way easily to a specific topic?

Source of evidence: Main survey

Evidence of success

Essential criteria

● Should explain clearly what the **scope** of the A to Z list is (eg council services for this organisation, or services provided by other public services, or all services in the community)

● Should provide deep links directly to the relevant part of the website if it does refer to **other websites** (eg in two-tier area)

● Should use an alphabetic index with **'clickable' alphabet**

● Should point to the **relevant area of the website** containing further information or, if not appropriate to do this, should contain a brief overview (eg contact details including e-mail)

● Should offer **list of items** to browse through, but should be organised in such a way that each section should not be too long (say, 1 or 2 screens), or too short

● Should ensure that entries are closely linked to **specific information pages**

● Should be accessible from **all main pages or sections** as well as the home page

● Should explain **acronyms** and hold **alternative names** for services (eg 'dustbins, refuse, rubbish')

Desirable criteria

● Should **point to a map** (eg Multimap or other external postcode mapping system) if the entry is based on a location (eg leisure centre)

Context

Signposting makes sites easier to use and an A to Z list is the navigational device that many users find first. It should provide an alphabetical list of all the main areas of the site, including the local authority services and common alternative names, so that users are able to find references to any reasonable topic entered. It may also cover services offered by other organisations linked to the local authority (eg local partnerships).
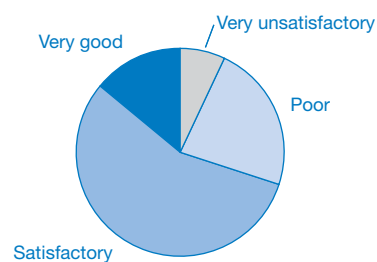
Chart 33a Summary of A to Z lists
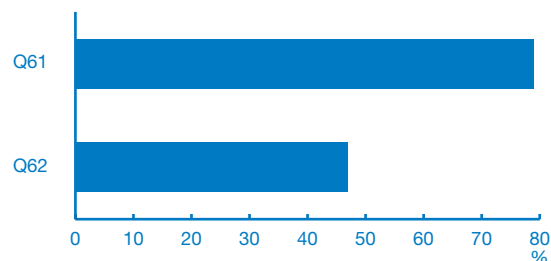
Chart 33b Analysis of A to Z lists

Questions

Q61 Is the A to Z organised in a way which makes it easy to find entries?

Q62 Is the scope of the A to Z clearly explained?

Analysis

Our questions only cover two of the criteria for an effective A to Z. Almost four council websites in five are well organised and just under half have a clearly explained scope.

Although our survey just has these two specific questions, the A to Z facility is used for most other parts of the survey in order to find specific pieces of information. The reviewers' overall comments on the quality of the A to Z are, therefore, based on many uses of it. 63 sites were rated as very good, almost the same as last year. There has been a small improvement of 35 sites moving from poor to satisfactory (around 15% increase).

The list of sites rated very good is too long to reproduce here, but we have selected ten sites as exemplars of good practice from the comments made by the reviewer, and alongside we have selected another seven with howlers.

A to Z lists: some howlers

✔ **Aberdeenshire CC**
The A to Z is well laid out, comprehensive and I find it the most effective way of finding information throughout the review.

✗ Horrible A to Z: it usually just sends you round and round, guessing at links, only occasionally linking through to a proper page and out of horribly circular listings system.

✔ **Brent**
Exemplary A to Z. Perfect!

✗ There are 2 links to the A to Z on the homepage. The one in the left navigation pane gives an error. The one on the right of the homepage works! This A to Z is in fact an A to Z across the region and not local. It has logos which are difficult to read and which are not explained.

✔ **Brighton & Hove**
Comprehensive explanation of the A to Z with search tips.

✔ **Burnley BC**
Brilliant A to Z, has contact info, links to online services and service summary. Best example so far.

✗ The A to Z sometimes works in a confusing way — when I click on the entry for 'libraries — renew a book' it takes me to a list of results in the search page instead of directly to the online libraries catalogue. I can't understand why this can't be more straightforward. It's really confusing.

✔ **Dundee City**
The A to Z is a brilliant example of how an A to Z should be — clear, easy to use, well presented and comprehensive. Simple is best when it comes to A to Zs.

✗ The A to Z is not always in alphabetical order. In the A section is B Bugs and 'Accounts' is after 'Adult Placement Service', which is after 'Allotments'.

✔ **East Cambridgeshire DC**
The A to Z uses tables and images to locate services both in the district and in the county. It does deep link into the correct part of the relevant site and, although it can take a bit of time to clearly understand it, it is very usable.

✗ Weirdly, the A to Z entries are not listed alphabetically under each letter eg the entry for 'schools' came after 'snow clearance'. There are lots of gaps in the A to Z where obvious services are not included and minor services are — eg there's an entry under E for 'education consultations', but there isn't an entry for just 'Education'. The A to Z needs to be really good as there isn't a main navigation bar that appears on every page, so this is a problem.

✔ **Gwynedd CC**
A really good A to Z — concise and well organised. There is also the option to search just the A to Z.

✔ **Lambeth**
Very well presented, scope very clear. Well done!

✗ Under 'C' the A to Z lists each councillor individually! No wonder the A to Z is completely unwieldy!

✔ **Lincoln City**
It was great to find an A to Z that was really comprehensive and very fast. It was a huge bonus.

✗ Two A to Zs confused me. Both fairly comprehensive, but not completely the same items. No explanation.

✔ **Woking BC**
A very comprehensive A to Z with good response times and which highlighted the possible use of portals such as Surreyonline. I liked the way telephone numbers, faxes and e-mails were included along with hyperlinks.

Key messages

● **If you do not yet have an A to Z list of services, build one into the next plan for improvement.**

● **Think carefully about the content, organisation and usability of the A to Z list.**

● **Avoid having more than one A to Z list of services.**

● **Apply 'Plain English' tests to the wording.**

● **Make sure that the list does cover all common terms.**

● **Provide deep links from the A to Z list into the rest of the website.**

● **Make the scope of the list clear and develop it so that it covers services provided by other councils and local agencies.**

● **Audit regularly to ensure the A to Z links through to relevant information and transactions as the site develops.**

Further information: See Appendix 1 for results of survey

If subscriber, visit *How did your council do?*, the subscriber-only area of www.socitm.gov.uk

5.3 Use of search engine

Does a specific word or phrase generally point people to the information they want?

Sources of evidence: Main survey
Supplementary survey
(SciVisum)

Evidence of success

Checklist for searching
Essential criteria

- Should be accessible from **every page**

- Should ensure that the page with the **search results** returns to either the previous page (back button), another search or the home page (home button)

- Should make clear the **scope** of what is being searched, eg several related sites, the whole site or part of the site

- Should make sure that the search includes the **A to Z index** as well

- Should use **flexible search criteria, keywords and categories** so that many combinations of searches can be carried out in a way that is easy to use

- Should make it clear how a search **using more than one word** and also punctuation (eg inverted commas) are both dealt with

- Should provide **advanced search features** that allow refinement of initial search results and document searches

- Should offer simply explained **tips** for using the search facility

Desirable criteria

- Should allow for **alternative spellings** or 'do you mean' for mis-spelt words

Checklist for finding
Essential criteria

- Should aim for a **small number of highly relevant results** that show the full path name of the item, together with a useful description and date so the viewer can check relevance

- Should show the **most useful pages first**

- Should display the number of search finds

- Should show **source of item found**

- Should indicate whether the item found is a **web page or a** *pdf*

- Should offer from results page '**back**' (back button) to search page or '**home**' (home page)

- Should provide a facility to **refine results**

Desirable criteria

- Should indicate the **sequence of the search results** — popularity, rating, weighting

- Should show the **match or level of 'fit'** for each result

- Should **highlight the search word or phrase** in the page or in the document found

The search should be tested with basic relevant words and phrases to ensure that appropriate and useful matches are returned high up the list (and not, for example, an endless procession of committee documents or press releases).

Note: these criteria are not explicitly checked as part of this survey for every website, but it is expected that search engines used to check answers to other questions should have these features.

Context

There is little doubt that the search engine plays a pivotal role in the usability of any large website. In terms of local government it has become an essential feature because council websites serve so many different audiences with such a wide range of information and services. Our criteria look at the two sides of a successful search engine, supporting the twin functions of searching and finding.

This year for the first time we are able to bring together tests that examine these two different functions and to identify how many council websites meet the standard expected of both. Firstly, with the help of SciVisum Ltd, we have examined the quality of the search facilities on offer. Secondly, we have examined the usefulness of the results from search engines through the questions in the main survey.

Testing search facilities

The objective of this supplementary survey was:

- to determine the quality of the technical implementation of search engines that local authorities run on their own websites in order to allow searching of their own website content

- to perform, in particular, an in-depth engineering analysis of how the engines function, focusing on issues that impact on users of the sites.

We commissioned a similar survey from SciVisum Ltd two years ago, thereby enabling us to compare improvements since then in this new survey.

Search engines are placed on a site with the intention of making it easier or quicker for users to find the exact content that they are seeking. If other menu choices do not provide an obvious indication of where to look, and if the content of A to Z lists of services on the site also do not help, then a user will turn to the search engine to find the information they need. Most internet users are now accustomed to using search engines such as Google to search the web for their needs, and so come to sites familiar with that concept.

This survey profiled the quality of search engines being run across local government under the following headings:

- Availability of search engines (Test 1)

- Handling of ' two word' searches (Test 2)

- Handling of common words (Test 3)

- Resilience with non-character searches (Test 4)

- Delivery of high speed results (Test 5)

- Results displayed per page (Test 6)

As the way that Google handles searches has become the de facto standard, these tests have been designed around that standard.

Analysis of search facilities
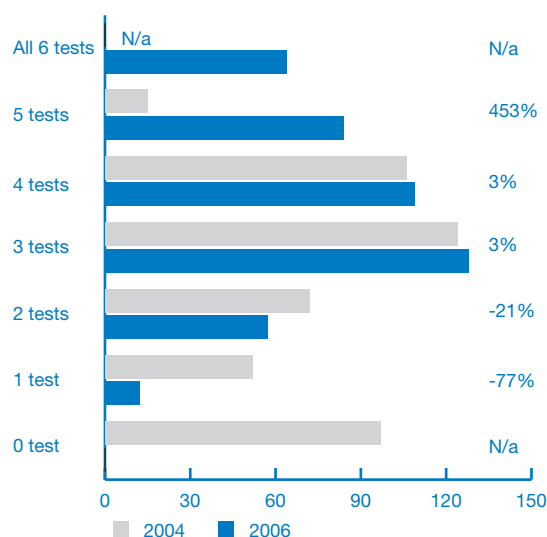
Chart 34 Analysis of search engine tests passed

All but one of the tests were also carried out in 2004, making possible a profile of improvement.

Test	Councils passing test 2004	Councils passing test 2006	Improvement in two years
1 Availability	381	454	19%
2 'Two word' searches	241	227	-6%
3 Common word handling	186	281	51%
4 Non-character searches	281	233	-17%
5 High speed results	N/a	317	N/a
6 Results per page	295	398	35%

Key

Test 1   No of sites available

Test 2   No of sites that handle a 'two word' search

Test 3   No of sites that exclude defined common words

Test 4   No of sites that exclude non-characters

Test 5   No of sites that return all pages within 5 seconds

Test 6   No of sites that keep results to a maximum of 25 per page

Chart 35 Analysis of individual search engine tests

The overall picture presented by these tests is one of improvement on most indicators. Firstly, the 19% increase in number of sites with a search engine is encouraging, with just 6 without one and 8 with one not working. On one of the five tests that can be compared over two years, the improvement is over 50%, and on two others there is a significant improvement. On the remaining two, the position has worsened. Finally, 72% of sites with search engines return results within an impressive five seconds. Two years ago, just 15 councils passed all five tests undertaken. Now 148 passed at least five out of the six tests.

On the other hand, 201 sites with search engines (44%) passed no more than three of these tests, indicating much scope still for improvement.

Now that internet users are familiar with them, search engines have become the most used tool for navigation in many sites. How each search behaves is important to the overall usability and usefulness of any site. However, our testing has shown that, from an engineering perspective, too many sites have search features that are badly implemented. The impact of these problems may be that users are confronted with unintelligible error pages, with search results that do not match their expectation of searching, and with highly variable search delivery speeds.

The solution to these problems lies in much better testing from a user perspective. Users should not be given an experience that takes them by surprise; they should not be left to wonder if the system is broken, or even worse that they themselves have 'done something wrong' and broken it.

No search engine?

Some 51 sites now use one of the search services offered by Google. The six councils that currently offer no search could rapidly implement a Google-based search facility. It might also prove to be a quick and easy fix for those eight sites whose search engines were broken throughout the period of this test.

As Google is the most used search engine, providing visitors with a search on the same service ensures maximum familiarity and comfort. At the same time it involves least effort to the web manager, and no extra load on the web server, because it is the Google database that processes the requests. Most of the 51 sites used the Google extensions to provide a search function that remains branded with their own site logo. There is no charge for this from Google.

Beware, though — do not do what one site has done and simply pass visitors across to Google with a pre-prepared query, taking them from the site unexpectedly with no easy route back to the council site!

Comments from SciVisum

Although a search engine is one of the most basic elements of true dynamic functionality on a web site, it is clear that in some instances it is not being properly implemented. Consistent with SciVisum testing of website functionality across the board, this test report also shows that search engines are all too often being 'hand crafted' uniquely by organisations, and insufficient effort is being taken to ensure that the function is engineered properly for stability, consistency and ease of use. The end result is that search engines neither provide a stable support to users, nor a stable and consistent load to the web server.

Testing search results

Our main survey asked a series of questions designed to test the usefulness of results returned by search engines.

Questions

Q11 Does a search for 'bullying' point to information for parents or guardians? (Keywords: bullying at school, bullying)

Q12 Does a search on 'school travel' lead to details of the arrangements for getting to school? (Keywords: school travel)

Q30 Does a search for 'pothole' lead to information about how to report one to the council (or tell you which authority is responsible for dealing with potholes)? (Keyword: pothole)

Q66 Does a search on 'emergency plan' lead you to finding such a plan? (Keywords: emergency plan)

Q67 Does a search on 'emergency plan' lead to a helpful message?

Q65 Are the search results presented clearly and in a helpful manner (with good clues as to what lies behind each result)?

Chart 36a Summary of search results
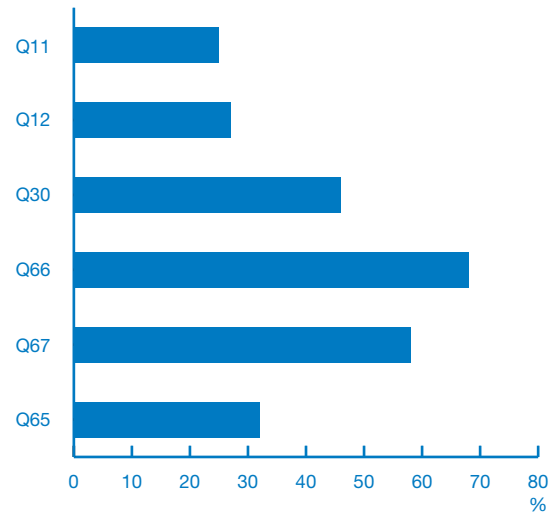
Chart 36b Analysis of search results

Analysis

We tested for four common terms related to topics that may have a general interest, but may not be easy to track in a council website, other than via a search engine. The response varied from 28% to 58%. We also tested a deliberate mis-spelling, which 32% of websites picked up. Adding the responses to the first four questions together, just 49 councils (10%) passed the full test. This compared with 32 councils that passed a similar test of four questions last year when the questions were arguably easier.

2005 test	2006 test
Public transport	Bullying
Council tax	School travel
Committee meetings	Pothole
Freedom of information	Emergency plan
Total passed 32 (7%)	**Total passed 49 (10%)**

Chart 37 Comparison of search results with last year

To this extent there has been a modest improvement. However, including the test on the mis-spelling, the numbers drop to 29 councils. If, in addition, the final question about presenting results clearly is collated, only 20 councils search engines that fulfil the task.

We asked the final question in this set last year as well and had an almost identical finding, which confirms that search engines have not improved in the past twelve months. On both occasions we expected to find, in addition to the link, a description of what is included in the page.

It might be argued that, overall, these results reflect the content of the website more than the search facility. However, since the terms are, or should be, essential terms, this is a fine distinction. All council websites should be able to provide 'Yes' answers to the four basic questions, as well as to the deliberate mis-spelling and to the question about the quality of the search facility.

Is this your council?

Take care to filter out unsuitable material. We found that searching for 'adult services' in two councils directed the visitor to pornography sites.

Examples of good practice

The tests of search engine facilities revealed 64 council websites that passed all six tests. The tests of search engine results showed that 20 council websites passed all the questions in the main survey. When comparing these two lists, we find that just four councils appear in both lists (three of them transactional sites in 2006).

- Bexley
- Brent
- Isle of Wight
- Milton Keynes

Key messages
Searching…

- **Make sure that your website does have a search engine.**
- **Check how well your search engine operates against the criteria described here.**
- **If about to select or implement a new one, do so carefully and test it properly.**

Finding…..

- **Make sure that your website's search engine finds the common terms that visitors might use and shows them in the first few results.**
- **Use our 'checklist for finding' to assess the effectiveness of the search facility.**
- **Arrange testing by people who are unfamiliar with the website.**

Further information See Appendix 1 for results of survey
See Appendix 9 for results of SciVisum tests

If subscriber, visit *How did your council do?*, the subscriber-only area of www.socitm.gov.uk

✔ **Corporation of London**
Excellent search, with ability to search within displayed results too.

✔ **Isle of Wight**
Very good search facility run by Google. When a word is misspelt, it gave the response 'Did you mean?

✔ **Havering**
Excellent search, with option to search pages, Word documents or .pdfs only. Presentation of results is exemplary.

Search engines: some howlers

✗ It was very 'hit and miss' as to whether the search pulled up a useful result. Not reliable. When looking for libraries info, I typed in 'Libraries' and received no useful results. When I typed in the word 'Library' I received libraries as the top result. This should have come up in my first search. It would also be a good idea for the word 'Search' to disappear automatically in the search box when you clicked into it. I had to delete it every time.

✗ Search broken. Inadequate titles mostly without a description but if you clicked on one, you got an error page — very unfriendly page with this message type:
Status report message: Not Found
Description: The requested resource (Not Found) is not available.

✗ The search section is interesting. There is a search box at the top of each page. Typing a phrase into the search box and pressing 'Enter' takes the user to the advanced search page, where the user has to retype the search term. Instead, the user has to click on the search button. This is not helpful and can become confusing and annoying to the user. The search results also show just the title and type of page and nothing more. This does not help the user either.

✗ Quite possibly one of the poorest search facilities I've seen on a local authority website.

5.4   Use of location

Can people find information easily by using a map or postcode (or other similar)?

Source of evidence: Main survey

Evidence of success

Essential criteria

● Should provide 'clickable' **maps** of areas, buildings (eg schools, leisure facilities), local attractions, linked to specific information about them

● Should provide **'Find the nearest'** facilities where the type of organisation or facility appropriate (eg educational establishments, businesses, community organisations, events, leisure facilities) can be found by entering a postcode and, ideally, should be shown on a map

Desirable criteria

● Should offer **map-driven databases** to help users find their nearest organisation or facility, and, in addition, a **location map** for each entry in the database

● Should include as information about location **information from adjacent areas** beyond the council area

● Should make maps accessible via the same **standard interface** throughout the site

● If a GIS system for maps is used, should give **instructions and response times** that are suitable for the general public over dial-up links

Context

Place differentiates local authorities. One very obvious set of navigational aids that develop from search engines relates to place names. All local authority websites should make full use of geographically based features such as maps or postcode searches, because people generally relate to their own area, town or street. This includes selection of services by location through 'Find my nearest?' searches.

Questions

Q10 Are schools shown on a map?

Q44 Can I find my nearest library (county) or leisure centre (all others)?

Q45 Does the site locate car parks or public transport information on a map for visitors to the area?
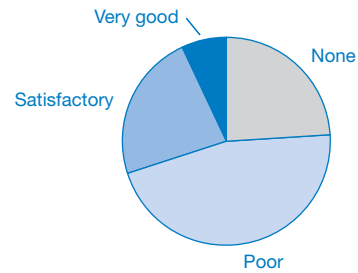
Chart 38a Summary of location results
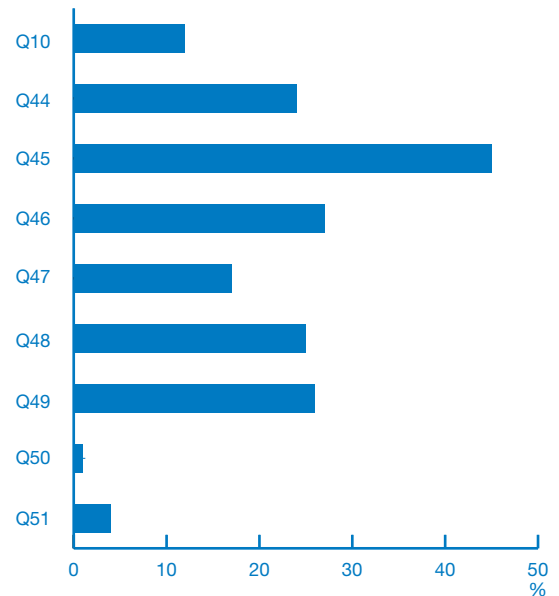
Chart 38b Analysis of location results

Q46 Is there information about roadworks in the area and where they are located on a map?

Q47 County: Can I find out about highway orders in the area via a map?

All others: Can I find out about planning applications in the area via a map?

Q48 If the site uses interactive mapping, does it provide an explanation about what it does and a simple 'help guide' for the user on how to get the most use out of the map?

Q49 Are mapping tools easy to use?

Q50 Does the site inform users that, if they are using a dial-up internet connection, it may take sometime to download the maps?

Q51 Does the site tell you how to obtain information in GIS maps in an alternative format?

Analysis

The first question originates from Scenario 2 (section 4.2) where the visitor looks for a map with schools on it — one very common reason for the average person to need GIS. A link to a facility such as Multimap for individual schools was not sufficient to score a positive answer. 12% of council sites did provide a map.

The next question tested a 'Find the nearest' facility for a library (in a county) or leisure centre (all others). Just fewer than one in four sites (24%) could provide this facility.

This was followed by a simple question about a map for visitors coming by private or public transport and showing relatively static information such as car parks or bus routes. 45% of sites did show such a map. A map showing current roadworks, or a list of roadworks that takes the visitor to a map, was more difficult to find. The reason is that such information changes much more frequently. The percentage of sites with this extra sophistication drops to 27% (128), but an increase from last year of 6% (97 sites).

A further example of a similar request is a highways order (county council) or a planning application (other councils). Here, reviewers started with a postcode when searching for a map containing this information. 80 councils (17%) provide this facility.

The remainder of the questions concentrate on ease of use. Web-enabled GIS applications are notoriously difficult to use. Our first question to test this looked for explanations about interactive mapping, what it does and a simple 'help guide' for the user on how to get the most use out of the map. One in four councils provide this, not far short of all who provide the facility (see answer to question about roadworks).

The next question related to ease of use of mapping tools. Again, just over one in four found the tools easy to use. GIS can be very slow to use, especially on a dial-up connection. Only seven councils take the trouble to warn visitors about the time it might take to download a map.

Examples of good practice

(ie all those rated very good and with at least six 'Yes' answers recorded)

- Corporation of London
- Durham CC
- East Sussex CC
- Guildford BC
- Kirklees MBC
- Leicestershire CC
- Northamptonshire CC
- Shropshire CC
- Stroud DC
- Surrey CC
- Wakefield MDC
- Wandsworth
- Westminster City

✔ **Adur DC**
Excellent GIS facility — you can enter a postcode then add layers, such as planning applications, waste and recycling, recreation venues, and even the route of the sewers.

✔ **Carmarthenshire CC**
Lots of facilities can be located using the online mapping tool. It's pretty easy to use and the help facility is quite good. There are links into the mapping facility throughout the website as well.

✔ **South Ayrshire**
I am so impressed with this online mapping. I can find libraries, registry offices, council offices etc on easy-to-use interactive maps. Well done.

GIS and accessibility

One major difficulty with GIS is that it is an immature technology in terms of accessibility. We asked whether councils provided any alternative ways for finding geographical information. Seventeen councils (4%) do find other ways round the problem. Two examples are shown below:

Further advice about this issue can be found in Appendix 10 on accessibility testing (RNIB).

Eastleigh BC

"Eastleigh Borough Council strives to meet the needs of computer users with visual impairment or other conditions that limit accessibility. Due to the graphics-intensive nature of the site, this geographic information cannot be presented in an accessible format. If you would like assistance with this please contact the GIS team at GIS@eastleigh.gov.uk or telephone 02380 688073."

Kensington & Chelsea

This site has both a map-based and text-based 'Find your nearest'. The map version states: "You can also view your results as text (for improved accessibility)" and includes a link to the text version.

Key messages

● **Maximise the use of 'Find the nearest' facilities.**

● **Provide simple maps for the locations of all services.**

● **Ensure that A to Z lists point to maps for locational references.**

● **Have a long-term plan to build more GIS facilities into your website and to store and use data based on the relevant location.**

● **Make sure that any GIS interfaces are easy to use and are not slow to operate.**

● **Find ways of managing the accessibility implications of GIS.**

Further information: See Appendix 1 for results of survey
See Appendix 10 for further information about GIS and accessibility.

If subscriber, visit *How did your council do?*, the subscriber-only area of www.socitm.gov.uk

✔ **Stroud DC**
This site has a really fantastic 'Find the nearest' tool that incorporates an easy-to-use GIS system. I was able to see a number of different locations and find out lots of basic information about my address such as my councillors and MP. Where a service was not available to view on the map, there were links to external websites that had the information, eg leisure centres on the www.activeplaces.com website.

✔ **Surrey CC**
Excellent map-based presentation of road works and improvements. Very easy to use.

✔ **West Oxfordshire DC**
The West Oxfordshire Property search is the most impressive I have seen. I can access tons of information about a property from council tax band, to nearest car parks; bin collection day to planning applications. This is very impressive use of the data and should be an example to all other councils. West Oxfordshire is leading the way!

5.5 Navigation

Can people rely on a clear and consistent style in finding their way around?

Sources of evidence: Main survey
SiteMorse for testing of
access keys

Evidence of success

Essential criteria
● Should have **intuitive navigation** with clear, meaningful names

● Should make **consistent use** of colour, text size, space and signposting

● Should have a **clear home page** that sets the style for the site

● Should include **clear directions** (eg size of documents) for 'clickable' content (eg external site, *.pdf*)

● Should use '**accesskeys**' for those who find a mouse difficult to use

These are just some of the ergonomic features that encourage usability, but it is not easy to provide checklists of usability features, because often the context is all-important. It is easier to point out common faults that are obstacles to usability such as this selection of irritants about home pages that should not be used:

● 'Splash' introductory screens before you reach the home page proper

● 'Flash' animations, particularly as introductory pages

● Large graphics that serve no purpose

● Home pages that take too long to load

● Scrolling text on the home page, and elsewhere

● Cryptic or vague names for site areas such as 'living' or 'enjoying'

● Long home pages

Context
Navigation around the site must be supported by attention to the 'nuts and bolts' of site design. Often referred to as usability, this covers a whole range of issues such as consistency, branding, layout, structure and technology. It is vital that visitors can confidently and accurately find their way about the site, and in particular go quickly to the piece of information, or the service, they require.

Chart 39a Summary of navigation

Chart 39b Analysis of navigation

Questions
Q88 Do the most useful navigation features display on every page without the need to scroll down?

Q89 Does the site feature a text-based hierarchy or trail of indicator links?

Q90 Are clickable documents always identified (eg as *.pdf*/Word), with file size given?

Analysis
One of the basics of sound navigation is the reference on every page to the most useful navigational features such as the link back to the home page, the search facilities, the A to Z list of services and the main menu. 80% of sites have these features referenced consistently, a very similar figure that we noted last year when we asked the same question.

Another basic feature is a text-based hierarchy or trail of indicator links. Last year 53% had this feature and this year 73% do, an increase of over 90 sites, which is encouraging.

Finally, we asked if clickable documents are always identified (eg as *.pdf*/Word), with file sizes given. We found that 54% of sites did this as a matter of course.

In all, a substantial number answered positively to each of these three tests — 168 sites in all.

Supporting these specific questions is a more open-ended question about the navigation around the site summarised in Chart 39a. Reviewers have tested the navigation of the site quite comprehensively by the time that they come to this question in the survey. The chart shows that 18% of sites have very good navigation and another 51% have satisfactory navigation. The combined figure of 69% compares with a figure of 70% twelve months ago.

Use of access keys
One special navigational aid that we tested for the first time last year is the use of access keys. This feature allows web designers to make it much easier for people who have some difficulties in using the mouse. The navigation can be programmed in with the help of access keys where functions are built into the keyboard.

Many people have an impairment that creates difficulties with fine motor control as the result of conditions such as Parkinson's Disease or Friedreich's Ataxia, or simply through age. Others have difficulties with the use of their arms or hands as the result of such conditions as cerebral palsy, a stroke or high spinal injury, or an upper limb disorder such as RSI. Some people with these types of condition may be able to access the internet by using access keys. They are not a panacea, because they cannot be used for everything, but they do allow you to use the keyboard rather than the mouse for some actions.

Using the SiteMorse testing product, we have been able to identify those councils who are committed to this very useful form of navigation to help people with disabilities. (Note: This test from SiteMorse does not indicate that access keys are obligatory, merely that, if they are used, sites should use the recommended set.)
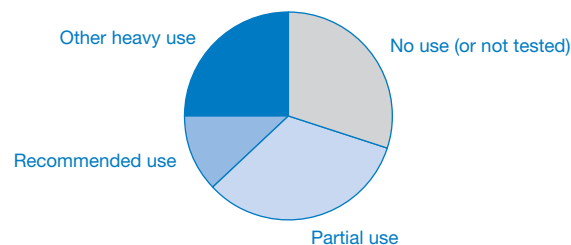
Chart 40a Use of access keys

Notes:
● **Partial use** indicates use from 1 to 10 keys.

● **Recommended use** indicates use of at least the recommended set of 11 keys.

● **Other heavy use** indicates use of 11 or more keys, but not including the full recommended set.

● Six websites were not available at the time of the test.

	2005	2006
No use of access keys	234	141
Use of 1 to 3 access keys	28	35
Use of 4 to 9 access keys	85	121
Use of 10 to 14 access keys	66	96
Use of 15 or more access keys	48	69
Not tested	2	6
Total	468	468
Full use of recommended set	52	56

Chart 40b Use of access keys (compared with 2005)

Camden
Very easy to use website, good use of graphics to engage user interest and encourage exploration.

Cotswold DC
A very well-organised website with excellent navigation. The A to Z and search both work pretty well, but generally I was able to find what I needed without having to use these very much.

Medway
This is a very usable site with logical navigation and a good search facility. The A to Z works well on the whole.

Renfrewshire
The page layout is excellent, the navigation is consistent and the site is a pleasure to use.

Shrewsbury & Atcham BC
This is so good that I actually had to look for a document to find out about its size as none had appeared unexpectedly during the review.

West Oxfordshire DC
Excellent usability — I glide through the site and it is a pleasure to use. The design is professional and it does not get in the way of the information.

This shows that 30% of sites do not use access keys at all. Most of those that do (59% in total) either make a partial commitment (eg use three or less access keys) or do not apply the standard properly (eg they do not use access key 0 which allows the designer to explain how to use the access keys). This implies widespread ignorance of the standard proposed by the Government. In fact, only 56 councils (12%), and just four more than last year, make full use of the recommended set (0 to 9, and S). We have not been able to check that each key in the recommended set has in fact been used for the recommended purposes, although it is unlikely that councils who have used the right set of access keys then go on to use individual keys for different purposes!

The full standard for access keys is given in Appendix 11.

Examples of good practice
(ie all those rated very good and with all 'Yes' answers recorded)

In total 86 councils meet these criteria, but we have only listed here those who also appear to conform with the government standard for the use of access keys.

● Aberdeenshire

● Adur DC

● Camden

● East Sussex CC

● Lichfield DC

● Redbridge

● Stockton-on-Tees BC

● Surrey CC

● Surrey Heath BC

● Thurrock BC

● Warwick DC

● Wrexham CBC

Key messages

● **Make sure that the most useful navigation features display on every page in a consistent manner without the need to scroll down.**

● **Make use of a text-based hierarchy or trail of indicator links in order to support good navigation.**

● **Commit to the use of access keys, but follow the government standard in doing so.**

● **Carry out usability testing during the design and development phase of any new facility to be added to the website.**

● **Overall, look at every aspect of usability to ensure that your website really is easy to use.**

Further information: **See Appendix 1 for results of survey**
See Appendix 11 for access key test (SiteMorse)

If subscriber, visit *How did your council do?*, the subscriber-only area of www.socitm.gov.uk

5.6 Design of transactions

Can people use online forms and other transactions easily?

Sources of evidence: None

Evidence of success

Essential criteria

● Should have a **clear narrative description of the purpose** of the form before inviting the visitor to download it

● Should provide **initial guidance** about information needed to complete the form

● Should have **online validation and help**, supported by phone/e-mail contacts, so that basic errors are not allowed

● Should be able to **save partly completed** and restart at a later time

● Should be prompted to **print a completed version** immediately after submission

Desirable criteria

● Should be able to **make payment** with the form or attach related documents (ie plans)

● Should be able at a later date to **retrieve a copy** of the form that has been returned

● Should present **pre-defined options** for user to select (eg drop-down menus)

● Should be able to provide **some pre-entered information** (eg address of the subject completing the form)

Context

Transactions include complaints, problem reporting, booking events or appointments, and all kinds of application forms. All of these can be handled in a similar way on the website, although some, such as booking an appointment, will appear to happen online, and others, such as planning applications, will require a form to be completed, and possibly printed and signed before being sent in. The following criteria apply to all these types of transaction, although some will be more relevant than others, depending on the type of transaction required. The key is to ensure that as much as possible is checked before submission in order to minimise human intervention.

Analysis

We have not carried out any detailed assessment of the usability of forms and other online transactions. Last year we published some detailed guidance relating to forms for job applications undertaken by a specialist in web-based forms design. This year some similar advice has been published by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) in England about usability of web applications. This comes in the form of a CD-ROM with step-by-step guidance relating to twelve major applications and at the same level of detail as our research last year into job applications. This is the first of a four-volume set about good practice for website usability to be completed in 2006.

Good practice guidance

The list of applications is given below, followed by some information about one particular application.

Ref	Transaction	Broad type
1	Pay council tax	Payment
2	Renew a library book	Login/register
3	Apply for a needs assessment (Social services)	Basic application
4	Report an abandoned vehicle/street light/pothole (environment problem)	Report an environment problem
5	Make a planning application	Complex application
6	Search for a book in a library catalogue	Search
7	Find nearest recycling centre	Location finder
8	Apply for a job	Use of stored profile in application
9	Book a bulky waste collection	Make a booking
10	Consultation survey — have your say on a local issue	Consultation
11	Report a noise nuisance	Report a community problem
12	Contact us form with appropriate feedback	Contact us form

Sample outline to one application supported by checklists of good practice

Transaction 4: Report an Abandoned Vehicle

Reporting an abandoned vehicle consists of 6 steps across 2 web pages and 1 e-mail. The recommendations and illustrations used for this transaction are applicable to the sequence and page layout for reporting any environmental problems.

Step 4.1	Page 1 — Problem location
Step 4.2	Page 1 — Problem description
Step 4.3	Page 1 — Contact details
Step 4.4	Page 1 — Submission
Step 4.5	Page 2 — Confirmation page
Step 4.6	E-mail — Confirmation e-mail

Good practice checklist:

Required practice

● Provide clear indication of mandatory fields

● Give an explanation of exactly what will happen after a report has been submitted

● Provide a number for any emergency problems such as a spill or live electrical wires

● Provide a link to site's privacy policy next to fields asking for users' contact details

● Provide a transaction reference number in the confirmation page and e-mail

● Provide a summary of all the information the user entered in the report in the confirmation e-mail

Good Practice

● Disable fields that are dependent upon the answer to a previous question; if the related answer is selected, then enable the fields for user input

● Provide users with a means to stop being contacted further after they have submitted their report in the confirmation e-mail

● Provide a link/button to report another environmental problem on the confirmation page and in the confirmation e-mail

Excellent Practice

● Provide links to cross-sell other online local authority transactions and websites on the confirmation page and e-mail

● Provide the name, if feasible, of the person that will be responding to/dealing with the problem and within what time frame they will be contacted

Good practice guidance for online transactions for local authority web managers (ODPM)

5.7   Accessibility

Can people use the site if they have a disability?

Sources of information: RNIB automatic survey (Stage 1)
Main survey (Stage 2)
RNIB specialist survey (Stage 3)
eAccessibility of public sector services in the European Union (RNIB, Socitm *Insight* and others commissioned by e-Government Unit, November 2005)

Evidence of success

Essential criteria

● Full compliance with Level A of Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) guidelines (Version 1)

● The priority outcomes policy for England specifies Level AA conformance by 31 March 2006

Further information: www.w3.org/tr /wai-webcontent

Context

Awareness of issues about accessibility of online government services has recently been heightened by the publication of two linked reports, commissioned by the e-Government Unit in 2005 from a partnership led by the RNIB and including Socitm *Insight*. The two publications are:

● *eAccessibility of public sector services in the European Union* (November 2005)

● *eAccessibility of '.gov.uk' services* (planned for March 2006)

In setting the context for the latest set of local authority results, we reproduce opposite an extract from the first of these two reports.

Extract from *eAccessibility of public sector services in the European Union*

It is important to see the issue of accessible online services within a broader context of accessibility in a multi-channel environment. Over the past five years there has been a major drive to put government services online supported by significant investments. The aim should be to integrate the online service offering into the right mix of channels best suited to the target user audience, with a priority given to designing inclusive services from the outset.

Impairment	Web	Phone	Face to face	Digital TV
Visual	●	●	▮	▲
Hearing	●	▲	▮	▲
Motor	●	▮	▲	▮
Cognitive	▲	▮	▮	▲

● OK with assistive facilities   ▮ OK for some   ▲ Problems for many

Chart 41 Accessibility by channel for different types of impairment

This chart illustrates the advantages and disadvantages of various channels of communication for citizens with a range of disabilities. The face-to-face channel can be effective for service delivery, but is the least efficient of the channels. Furthermore, travelling to and using a face-to-face channel is often problematical for those with motor, visual or hearing impairment. Telephone is inaccessible to the hearing-impaired and difficult to operate for those with certain physical disabilities. Digital TV has limited accessibility to the visually impaired and can present difficulties for the deaf and hard of hearing if suitable captioning or signing avatars are not available. Again, this can be costly.

Web-based services have the potential to be accessible to a wider range of citizens if used correctly. Widespread adoption of web-based services designed for use on the PC has led to efficiency advantages in delivering services via fewer channels. If the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) Guidelines from the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) are followed, websites can be made accessible to a very wide variety of people with disabilities and the delivery of inclusive government services in a multi-channel context becomes a more achievable objective through an accessible internet channel.

It is estimated that over eight million people in the UK suffer from some form of disability causing them to have difficulty in using the standard PC and keyboard. When designing websites, organisations should take into account the needs of all those with difficulties in using technology. Accessible website design should ensure that web pages are easy to use in the broadest sense for all those who visit a website. This includes how the site functions, its usability, page layout, use of language and readability as well as how to it meets the requirements of those using adaptive or alternative technology.

Methodology

As last year, we have in this year's survey used a combination of automated and human assessments to enable us to review all 468 sites against the standardised and accepted Version 1 of the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 1.0).

The priority outcomes policy states that the 'good' outcome for accessibility for all councils in England is to achieve by 31 March 2006 Level AA compliance of the Website Accessibility Initiative (WAI) standards. As we expected very few councils to reach this level, our survey this year has again focused on assessing Level A conformance, although we have also included tests for Level AA conformance for the very small number that approach that standard.

Following the recommendation of the RNIB, we have adopted a three-stage process in order to reduce the specialist input required to a minimum.

Stage 1   Questions that could be answered by an automated benchmarking tool (Greytower Technologies)

Stage 2   Questions that could be answered as part of the main review by the Socitm *Insight* team (non-technical test)

Stage 3   Assuming sites passed Stage 1 and 2, further questions that can only be answered by specialist consultants (in this case the RNIB and AbilityNet)

In total there are 17 checkpoints in Level A of the guidelines. Most of the checkpoints are covered by at least two of the testing stages.
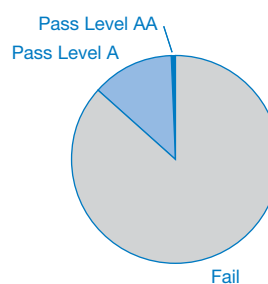
Chart 42 Accessibility of council websites
(Note: five sites not tested)

Analysis

This shows that 3 passed Level AA and another 59 passed Level A. The total of 62 passing Level A compares with 62 that also passed Level A last year. A small group of another 4 councils came very close to being assessed as Level AA.

From the 62 that passed Level A last year, just 17 passed this year and the remaining 45 failed. This also means that 45 that passed at least Level A this year did not achieve it last year.

Other interesting points about those that passed:

- Three districts in Dorset (not included in figures above) benefit by now being part of www.dorsetforyou.com which has reached Level A. A fourth Dorset district has also reached Level A in its own right.

- Three shire districts of the seven in Northamptonshire passed Level A as did three out of the eleven in Surrey and three out of five in Warwickshire.

- Out of the 62 that passed, 53 came from England (14% of the total) and 9 from the rest of the UK (11%). This comparison suggests that the priority services outcome target for England has made very little impact in making websites more accessible.

- Content management systems can help in encouraging accessibility. We have been able to track those that seem to do better. We can select one that has had good results. Six out of 13 councils that we know to have Jadu systems pass level A. Other suppliers have had a few successes, but not in the same proportion.

These results are generally very disappointing given the awareness amongst web teams of the need to get accessibility right and the existence of a clear target in England. The sense of disappointment will be heightened when one looks at the results of Stage 1 in our assessment process based on automatic testing.
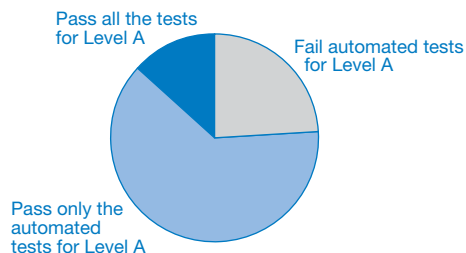
Chart 43 Automated testing for accessibility

(Note: five sites not tested)

Here the performance is much better. 349 sites pass the automated tests (stage 1 of our methodology), but only 62 go on to pass the manual tests. This is doubtless because this part of the Level A benchmark is much easier to test and as a result there are many automated testing tools on the market. The problem is that automated tests only cover about 30% of the Level A checkpoints and the remaining 70% are harder both to get right and then test.

Further information about the role of automated evaluation of e-accessibility is discussed in Appendix 3 of the two reports on accessibility of online services in the EU and across the UK.

Claims about WAI guidelines

As part of a separate exercise we have also been able to find out those councils that make a claim about Level A, AA or even AAA conformance and match the claims with the reality. In total we found 65 councils from all the T sites and C+ sites (289 in total) that claimed on their home page some level of conformance. This would seem to be in line with the assessments reported here, but the reality is different!
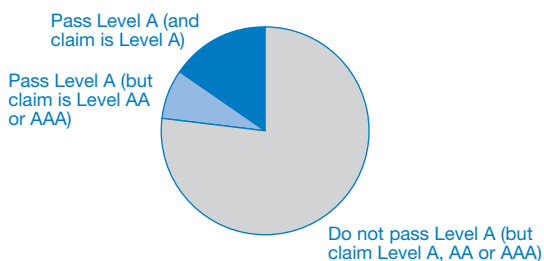
Chart 44 Claims about accessibility

This paints a disturbing picture. There is no doubt that achieving Level A is hard work and that measuring it is a complex business. Many might also be lulled into thinking that passing the automated tests of Level A (and Level AA and AAA) means that you have achieved conformance at those levels. Another explanation might be that the site did comply with Level A (or even Level AA) at the time when the claim was made, but has since slipped back.

Given that our results this year and last show that it is even more difficult to maintain Level A conformance once it has been achieved, it might be much safer to avoid making any claims at all, even though it is understandable to promote real achievements.

It is vital to understand where the reasons for failure lie in order to propose actions for improvement. The report entitled *eAccessibility of '.gov.uk' services* (planned for March 2006) and its earlier EU counterpart, found that a high number of errors related to relatively few problems repeated many times. If the five kinds of problem that accounted for almost all of the failures at Level A could be corrected, virtually all the sites tested in that report could have achieved the full Level A benchmark. These problems are listed below:

Error	Description of WCAG checkpoint	Priority 1 Reference
1 Missing alternative text for image	Provide a text equivalent for every non-text element	Checkpoint 1.1
2 Missing FRAME titles	Title each frame to facilitate frame identification and navigation	Checkpoint 12.1
3 Missing alternative text for image map area	Provide a text equivalent for every non-text element	Checkpoint 1.1
4 Missing NOFRAMES alternative	Provide a text equivalent for every non-text element	Checkpoint 1.1
5 Missing alternative text for applets	Provide a text equivalent for every non-text element	Checkpoint 1.1

Source: *eAccessibility of '.gov.uk' services*

As can be seen from this table, even four out of five of these reasons are, in effect, the same problem related to different features of a website, ie the absence of appropriate alternative text for images of one sort or another.

The future

The importance of accessible websites will be heightened by various developments which will be raised in 2006 such as:

● the introduction of the Public Sector Disability Equality Duty (DED) in the Disability Discrimination Act (2005) which expanded the original 1995 Act

● the launch by the BSI of the Publicly-Available Specification (PAS 78) — *Guide to Good Practice in Commissioning Accessible Websites*.

These events should remind all web managers and their steering groups of the need to address the issues outlined from this year's survey of e-accessibility.

Examples of good practice

It is not feasible to list all those that have achieved Level A accessibility, even though for each council this is a major landmark in the development of its website. We have selected some of those for reasons stated below.

Those achieving Level AA:
- Clackmannanshire
- Kensington & Chelsea
- Thurrock BC

(Another 4 came very close: Aberdeenshire, Bridgnorth DC, Kettering BC and Mansfield BC)

Those sustaining Level A from 2004
- Woking BC
- Wolverhampton MBC

Those sustaining Level A from 2005
- Castle Morpeth BC
- Coventry City
- East Sussex CC
- Elmbridge BC
- Gedling BC
- Hinckley & Bosworth BC
- Huntingdonshire DC
- Kensington & Chelsea
- Kettering BC
- Melton BC
- Mid Sussex DC
- Reigate & Banstead BC
- Thurrock BC
- Weymouth & Portland BC
- Winchester City

Those making valid claims about Level A (or the RNIB See It Right benchmark)
- Kensington & Chelsea (actually achieving Level AA)
- Mid Sussex DC
- Reigate & Banstead BC

- Taunton Deane BC
- Thurrock BC (actually achieving Level AA)

Key messages

- **Realise the scale of the task in achieving the Level A standard, and then, after that, the Level AA standard.**

- **Examine carefully the common reasons why many sites fail.**

- **In particular, examine the reasons why those that last year achieved Level A have since slipped back.**

- **Raise the profile of website accessibility in your organisation, but ensure that the long-term implications of maintaining accessibility are understood.**

- **Build accessibility plans into the next major revamp of your website.**

- **Compare carefully the features of any automated testing tools that you might want to use.**

- **Think very carefully about making any public claims about the accessibility of your website.**

- **Consider the toughening of the legislative framework for accessibility of websites.**

- **Do not think of accessibility as one finite project, but aim to sustain an accessible website for the long-term.**

Further information: See Appendix 1 for results of survey
See Appendix 10 for methodology (RNIB)

If subscriber, visit *How did your council do?*, the subscriber-only area of www.socitm.gov.uk

Visit the RNIB Web access centre (www.rnib.org.uk/webaccesscentre)

Visit the Disability Rights Commission website about the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 (www.drc.org.uk)

Read *eAccessibility of public sector services in the European Union* (November 2005)

Read *eAccessibility of '.gov.uk' services* (planned for March 2006)

5.8 Readability

Can people understand what the site says?

Source of evidence: Emphasis Training Ltd for readability testing

Evidence of success

Essential criteria

● Consistent use of **principles of Plain English**

● Use of **other languages** by local community where there is a real local requirement (eg Welsh language option for all councils in Wales) supported by clear signposts to policies and 'help' facilities about use of other languages

Desirable criteria

● '**Internet Crystal Mark**' accreditation from the Plain English Campaign

Context

Much of the hard work in developing and supporting websites can be undone if the information found is not easy to understand, or if the terminology used to guide visitors round the website is not simple and clear. Just as printed material meant for the general public should be carefully written and checked for its content, so should website content. The language in which the content is written must be simple and easily understood. Not only does this cover English, but other frequently used languages by local communities.

Methodology

The readability of websites is among the hardest features of usability to judge, because it cannot easily be measured on large diverse sites that are offered for a wide variety of visitors. Moreover, the assessment process is inevitably subjective. To conduct a readability test for all local authority websites is well beyond the scope of this survey.

Last year we commissioned a survey of over 50 websites from a company that specialises in this work (Emphasis Training Ltd). This company has developed an assessment system that takes account of level of detail, layout, clarity and style, structure and accuracy (spelling etc). This system is based on a mixture of automated and professional testing. However, it is only realistic for our survey to commission just the automated testing, but this does at least give an idea of the readability of all **T** sites plus some others that are well-advanced in other ways.

The automated testing analyses factors of language such as sentences per paragraph, words per sentence, characters per word and use of passive sentences. It also calculates two indicators, ie the Flesch Reading Ease score and the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level (used in USA). Both these indicators are explained in Appendix 8.

Analysis

For the purposes of this survey we have used the Flesch Reading Ease score as the most appropriate single measure of readability, where the target should be score of 60 or over. Sixteen councils achieve this benchmark, compared with five last year. Six of these also achieve the other benchmark set by the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level.

It is also useful to look at the targets for the other factors.

Feature	Target	Achieved by (sample of 73)	Spread
Sentences per paragraph	2-4	27 councils (38%)	1 to 23
Words per sentence	10	0 councils	11 to 29
Characters per word	4-5	41 councils (57%)	4.2 to 5.7
Use of passive sentences	10%	34 councils (47%)	0% to 38%
Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	7-8	6 councils (8%)	6 to 12

Chart 45 Readability results

These are all useful guides to readability. It is encouraging that on all the indicators, except words per sentence, the percentages of those achieving the benchmark have increased by at least 50%, reflecting the increase in the numbers of those achieving the Flesch Reading Ease score.

We should, however, always remember that it is not easy to assess this criteria in any context, still less with automated tools, and still less when content is written for a wide variety of audiences.

Examples of good practice
(achieving target for Flesch Reading Ease)

- Brent

- Camden

- Canterbury City (also Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level)

- Chester City

- Derby City

- Isle of Wight

- Lewisham

- Maidstone BC

- Milton Keynes (also Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level)

- Borough of Poole (also Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level)

- Shrewsbury & Atcham BC

- Southwark (also Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level)

- Surrey Heath BC

- Tameside MBC (also Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level)

- West Lothian (also Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level)

- Wrexham CBC

Internet Crystal Mark

The best-known standard in the use of language is the concept of Plain English developed by the Plain English Campaign, a pressure group that has been effective in promoting it and has produced the Internet Crystal Mark. Not many organisations have committed to this benchmark, but local government leads the way with 29 representatives (see list opposite, including five new ones). For the first time the growth is now occurring outside London and the South-East, where most of the early adopters came from.

Further information: www.plainenglish.co.uk

Other approaches

There is at least one other similar scheme (see overleaf). In addition, councils can explain their commitment to policies on Plain English as one council has done (see overleaf).

Examples of good practice
(achieving award of Internet Crystal Mark)

- Allerdale BC

- Bracknell Forest BC*

- Camden

- Cornwall CC

- Ealing

- East Staffordshire BC

- East Sussex CC

- Essex CC*

- Gloucestershire CC (Transport and Roads section only)

- Greenwich*

- Isle of Wight

- Islington

- Kensington & Chelsea

- Kirklees

- Lambeth

- Merton

- Newcastle-under-Lyme BC

- North Lanarkshire*

- Staffordshire CC

- Surrey CC

- Thurrock

- Tower Hamlets

- Waltham Forest

- Wandsworth

- Warwickshire CC

- Wrexham CBC

- Greater Manchester Revenues and Benefits Consortium*

*New in 2005

Winning Websites — accreditation criteria from The Plain Language Commission

No website will ever be perfect, but to earn the right to display the Winning Website logo it should meet the criteria shown by the following questions:

Purpose
Is the purpose of the material obvious or stated early and clearly?

Content
Is the information accurate, up to date, relevant and complete, anticipating questions and answering them? Is essential jargon explained or defined?

Are contact points stated for readers who want to know more?

Structure and usability
Is the information well organised and easy to navigate through, with appropriate headings, sub-headings, links, and other signposting?

Is there appropriate use of graphics, diagrams and summary panels? Are there adequate access facilities for people with older computers?

Style and grammar
Is the language appropriate for the audience, with a good average sentence length (say 15-20 words) and reasonably short paragraphs?

Is the material free of pomposity, verbosity and officialese?

Is the text grammatically sound and well punctuated?

Is capitalisation consistent in text and headings?

Layout and design
Overall, does the site look good?

Is the type highly legible and is there ample space between lines of type?

Is there a clear hierarchy of headings and spaces?

Have bold type and colour been used consistently and well?

www.clearest.co.uk

Example of good practice
Northamptonshire CC

Most councils will not want to commit to accreditation processes such as the Internet Crystal Mark, but it is sensible to commit to the principles of 'plain English'. Northamptonshire CC displays this statement of commitment on its website:

- We are always trying to improve the information on our website, both in terms of quality and quantity of information.

- We have over 80 staff adding content to our site. All have been trained to use our content management system. This allows a trained member of staff to log in to the website and post content relevant to their service on to the site.

- This allows us to add information on to the site much quicker than in the past, when a central team was responsible for creating and adding content onto the site. There is no longer a bottle-neck stopping the information being added.

- We have engaged with the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) on how to make our site as accessible as possible for the public.

- All of our users are trained to use the system; guidelines based on the RNIB Web Accessibility standards have been created to make sure the information added is of a consistent and genuine quality.

- We have held specific 'Writing for the web' courses to encourage staff, not to just reproduce leaflets, but to write specifically for the web.

- When creating pages we advise that the URL of the page should be no more than 8 characters with no spaces. We also offer the same advice when creating different categories within the site.

- We encourage staff then adding documents to the site, to include in the hyperlink text, the format and size of the document and to offer both Word and .pdf versions wherever possible.

www.northamptonshire.gov.uk

Key messages

● **Use a panel of visitors (or other third party) to assess how readable the content is.**

● **If evidence is negative, produce a plan to improve the readability of your website content.**

● **Educate all content providers in the importance of producing readable content and in techniques for achieving this.**

● **Develop a statement of commitment to producing readable content.**

Further information: See Appendix 1 for results of survey. See Appendix 8 for methodology of readability testing (Emphasis Training) Visit www.writing-skills.com for free tips on writing clear web content

5.9   Resilience

Can people rely on the site to be available and working properly?

Sources of evidence: SiteMorse survey for technical assessment
Main survey for visitor perception
Hytec survey for security test

Evidence of success

Essential criteria

● Website **available for 100%** of the time (excluding any planned downtime for maintenance, or for factors totally outside the organisation's control)

● **Statistics about availability** published on the website, including targets, actuals and planned downtime

● **Home page opened up** consistently within the industry average of 15 seconds

● **Number of broken links** minimised as the size of the website grows

● Evidence of **security policy and procedures** when asking visitors for information

Context

As websites become transactional, they must become resilient as operational channels. The disciplines associated with a production environment for ICT systems must now be built into the whole management process. Good performance and availability are an integral part of a usable design. This includes a number of issues, most of which can be tested automatically, such as opening up the home page and monitoring broken links.

Methodology

To test website resilience we have used the website automated testing product from SiteMorse Ltd. This covers a number of detailed tests, from which we have selected for the purposes of this report those that we believe to be the most important:

● Site errors

● Service availability

● Home page performance

For the first time we have explicitly asked our reviewers to give their perception of the site's resilience as they carry out their review. We give their verdict after we examine the SiteMorse technical assessment.

Finally, for the first time we have conducted a security test of 20 sites with the help of Hytec Information Security Ltd.

Site errors

This test concerns 'site errors', defined by SiteMorse as 'those problems found that are likely to impact negatively on the proper operation of a website'. This includes technical build errors, content-based error (bad links, missing files etc) and report numbers and types of non-compliance for each site with problems that:

● prevent the site from operating correctly, ranging from broken links and missing images to less than obvious problems about e-mail address or 'html' syntax, or lead to noticeable degradation in the performance of the website

● arise from non-compliance with standards laid down by both World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) and Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF). One of the problems attributed to poor technical site-build quality can be incorrect or non-standard characters used in the code or directory structuring.

Appendix 11 contains a full definition. The test has been confined to the top 250 pages in each website and no more than two 'clicks' from the home page. The full website has not been tested, but the results give a good indication of overall website performance.

Since this product first became known in early 2003, there have been many debates about it because its supplier publishes the results openly. Some of the more frequently asked questions are covered in Appendix 11.

This chart shows the results of this test taken on 5 and 6 January 2006 (six council websites were not accessible).
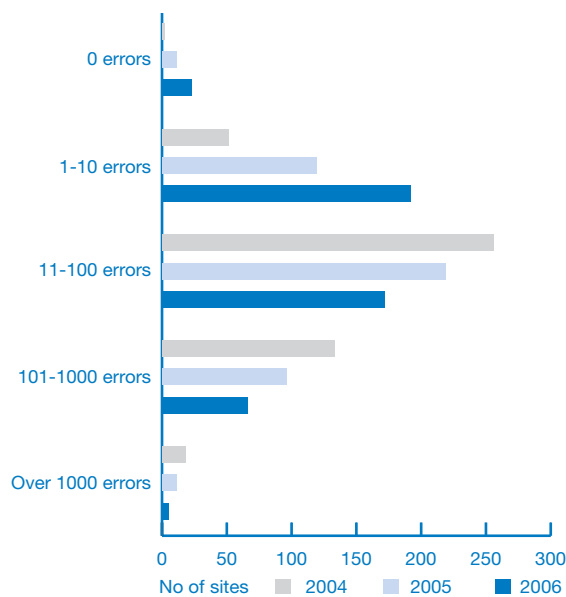
The performance on this measure remains variable as in the previous two years, although there is clear improvement. On the one hand, 215 (130 in 200%) had fewer than 10 errors, yet 71 councils had over 100 errors. This prompts the question as to what should be an acceptable number to aim for. The supplier of SiteMorse suggests that organisations should aim for 10 or fewer errors (49% of the FTSE 100 companies now achieve this). Our advice is that 100 site errors are the maximum that can be accepted as tolerable at the current state of website development in the public sector. 387 councils (83%) achieve this benchmark (8% higher than in 2005) compared with 84% of FTSE 100 companies that now achieve this.

The breakdown by scale of errors shows uneven improvement. The number that have less than 10 errors (the SiteMorse benchmark) has increased by 65% and the number with no errors has doubled to 11 to 23. However, the number with more than 100 errors has not dropped at quite the same rate (from 107 councils to 71), a factor that keeps the average number of errors still quite high.

During the course of the past three years the SiteMorse product has received a high profile in local government circles. One of the main justifications for the results to be used in this report is that it gives a useful benchmark of improvement over time, and a comparison with other sectors that no other product currently provides. The detailed tests have remained the same, but the results over time are quite different. In the past 12 months, there has been a 40% reduction in the number of errors, compared with 25% and 48% in the previous two years. This trend of improvement is impressive, even though it has slowed down after the first year when the results were first published and opened eyes to what was going on in the technical performance of the site.

Chart 46 Site errors near home page
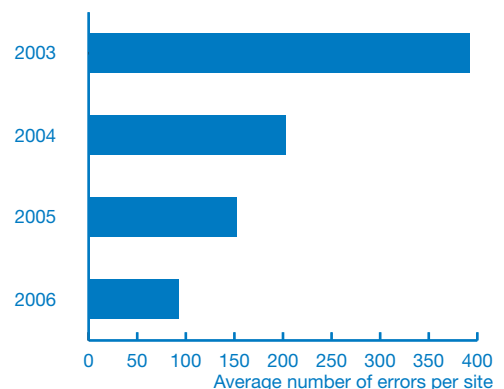
Chart 47 Reduction in site errors (over time)
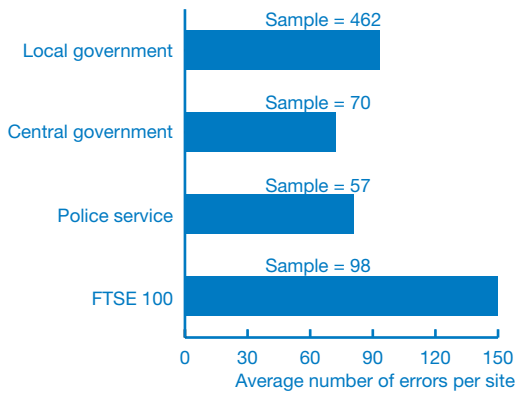
Chart 48 Reduction in site errors (by sector)

The average of 93 errors per council website compares with averages of 72 errors per central government site, 81 errors per police site and 150 errors per site in FTSE 100 companies.

Overall, as the chart below shows, 212 councils have made an improvement by reducing the number of errors by 10 or more (73 with over 100 fewer errors), set against 126 councils whose sites have seen errors rise by 10 or more (53 with over 100 more errors). 118 councils have neither improved nor deteriorated to any extent.
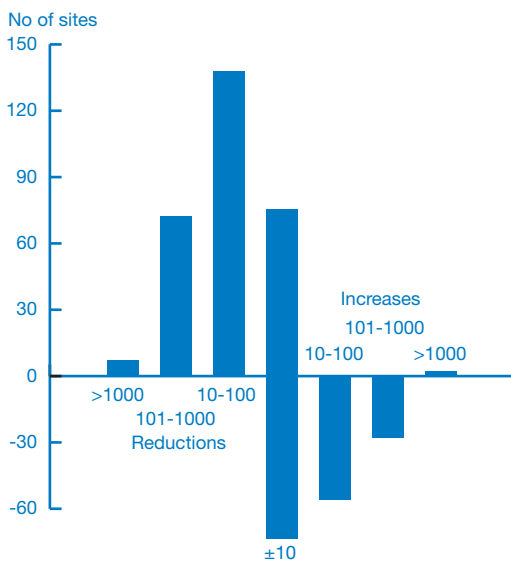
Chart 49 Improvements in reducing site errors

Note: No comparison can be made in 16 cases because information is missing in 2005 and/or 2006.

Examples of good practice
Site errors (ie all those with major improvements)

In all, 23 sites had no errors, too many to list here, but we have selected two smaller groups that have made major improvements.

From over 1000 errors in 2005 to less than 100 now

● City of Bradford

● Braintree DC

● South Norfolk DC

From over 100 errors in 2005 to no errors now

● Broxbourne BC

● Dorset CC

● Gwynedd CC

● Herefordshire

● Tynedale DC

● Wakefield MDC

Links with content management systems

The implementation of content management systems should reduce the risk of the errors identified by SiteMorse, because templates and defaults can be set up without errors built in. With the help of the London Borough of Brent we have updated our knowledge of all the content management systems in use from our first survey published two years ago.

First of all, the survey confirms a fragmented and dynamic marketplace. Now over 90% use a content management systems (95% if we exclude Northern Ireland) compared with 50% two years ago. The numbers of in-house systems have nearly doubled (from 26 to 51). Of those that are using them there are 62 products in use, 24 of which are found in just one site. The most commonly used ones are those based on offerings from Microsoft (59), Goss (33), Open Text (33) and IBM (Lotus) (28).

The main purpose of carrying out the survey is to see whether the content management system makes a difference in improving the usability of the site. The table opposite shows the SiteMorse results by content management system. We have only listed those systems in use at least five sites, according to our records.

Content management system	No of sites	SiteMorse errors per site (Jan 2006)	Comments
Co-operative IT (CIT)	6	8	
Rutland Online (rol)	13	8	
Immediacy	20	16	
EIBS	7	16	
Mediasurface	8	24	
Hyperwave	5	36	
Stellent	8	37	
Web-Labs	10	38	
Abacus e-Media	13	45	
Jadu	13	63	
Open Text	33	67	
Tridion	11	70	
Goss	33	74	
RedDot	8	84	
APLAWS	19	134	
In-house solution	51	154	One case nearly 4000 errors and another over 1000 (otherwise average of 58)
Microsoft	59	158	One case nearly 6000 errors (otherwise average of 59)
IBM (Lotus)	28	248	One case over 4000 errors (otherwise average of 92)
Average	**462**	**93**	**Five cases over 100 errors (otherwise average of 57)**

Chart 50 Performance of content management systems

In drawing conclusions from this we should recognise that:

- some local authorities use a mixture of in-house and supplier software which means that it is not always easy to define what system they use

- the technical resilience of the site is not just a function of the software used, but of the management of that software by those who support it locally

- many councils with systems have only recently installed them (say in the preceding six months to our survey) and may not have gained enough expertise in using them to the full

Service availability

The SiteMorse tests also allow us to measure technical resilience in terms of service availability. A test was run to check the availability of every local authority website for every hour between 2pm on 11 January 2006 and 2pm on 21 January 2006 — exactly the same period when the test was run last year, amounting to 240 tests for 462 websites reviewed. The results are summarised in the chart below:

Errors	Availability	Sites in 2004	Sites in 2005	Sites in 2006
0	100.0%	300	279	36
1	99.6%	64	80	105
2	99.1%	21	31	121
3	98.7%	14	19	39
5	97.9%	10	11	41
6-10	Down to 95.7%	18	14	40
11-50	Down to 78.6%	28	26	57
51 or more		12	9	23
No information				6
Total		**467**	**469**	**468**

Chart 51 Service availability

These figures are much worse than in 2004 and 2005, with a large percentage of sites that last year hit 100% availability now not doing so, although most of them have experienced just one or two instances of not being available. This may reflect the greater load of numbers of transactions being taken on during 2005 by council websites.

Overall, the performance for local government as a whole has dropped down from 98.2% availability to 95.2%.

Home page performance

The next step in this process is to test the speed of the opening of the home page, a critical part of the user experience. The factors that have to be taken into account are the server response times, the bandwidth the server uses, the size and technical quality of the home page, and, finally, the type of connection available to the user. The SiteMorse tests cover all these factors. If we define a standard for each of the five elements of the test, we can identify the good performers that achieve this standard:

1	Server response	0.25 seconds or less
2	Speed of downloading	Over 40,000 bps
3	Home page size	Under 100k (Government guidelines suggest 40k)
4	Technical errors on home page	Average of less than one in a 10 day period
5	Speed test at workstation	All three tests passed
	Workstation at 56 kbps	14 seconds (home/modem user)
	Workstation at 512 kpbs	6 seconds (ADSL user)
	Workstations at 1 Mbps	4 seconds (corporate/LAN user)

The overall performance of local government can be described as follows:
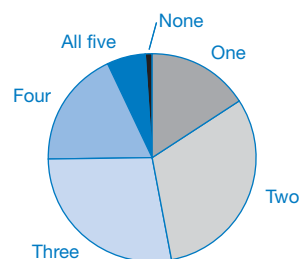
Chart 52 Home page performance (tests passed)

If we add all the tests together for all councils (5 x 468), the pass rate can be measured for local government as a whole to be 33% (774 tests out of 2340 maximum), a deterioration from last year's 56% (30% in 2004).

Examples of best practice

In all, just five councils pass all five tests, compared with 64 last year.

● Aylesbury Vale DC

● Hertfordshire CC

● Inverclyde

● North Norfolk DC

● Tunbridge Wells BC

Better connected 2006 A Socitm *Insight* publication © Socitm 2006

Questions

Q78 Is there a link to the 'Get Safe Online' campaign website? (www.getsafeonline.org)

Q79 Can you find evidence of reassuring the user about security?

Q80 Did the site stay up right through the review?

Q81 Was the site available when you wanted to review it?

Q82 How fast is the site? (0 is not usable, 1 is poor, 2 is satisfactory, 3 is very good)

Analysis of results

It is in everyone's interest to spread the message about security. It was encouraging to find that just under one in five councils had already put a link in their website to this extremely useful new source of information that was launched at the start of November 2005. This new website called Get Safe Online (www.getsafeonline.org) was launched to help website visitors protect themselves against internet threats. The site is sponsored by government and leading businesses working together to provide a free, public service.

Our second question tested the perception of trust by asking reviewers to look for evidence of reassurance about security. They were able to find that evidence in 277 cases (59% of all sites). We have found a number of good examples, including Banbridge DC, Shepway DC and Dudley MBC, an extract of which is reproduced below. Many others provided good security information in the online payments section, but without extending that principle to statements of reassurance across the site.

The next question tested the availability of the site during the review period itself. It is of some concern that 78 sites (17%) did not survive an hour of usage without crashing. One site in twenty was not available when the site review was due to start.

Finally, we asked reviewers about perception of
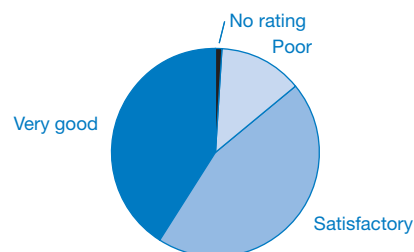
Chart 53 Summary of perceptions of speed
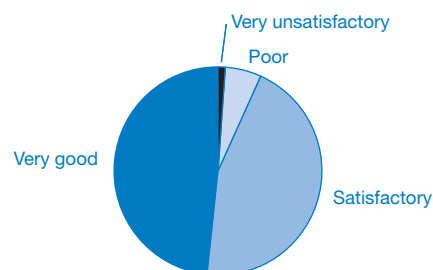
Chart 54a Summary of resilience
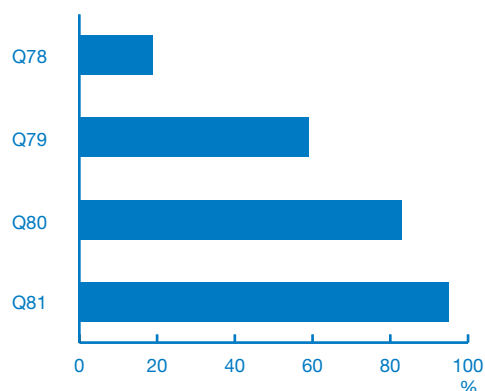
Chart 54b Analysis of resilience

speed. Just over two sites in five were rated very good, and even more as satisfactory. In total, this came to 86% of sites, leaving the rest as poor or not usable (just three cases).

If we link the last two questions about availability and speed, it seems as if about one in seven sites do not match at least user perceptions of satisfactory technical performance.

Dudley MBC

"Some of the services on our website do give visitors the option of using a secure transmission method to send us their personal data. Where this is the case you will see a gold padlock symbol at the foot of the page on the right hand side. A message may also appear stating that you are viewing information over a secure connection.

Where this is not the case, your attention is drawn to the fact that any information provided over the internet is not secure; e-mails can be intercepted, lost, redirected, changed and read by other people.

We have implemented security policies, rules and technical measures to protect the personal data that we have under our control from:

Unauthorised access

Improper use or disclosure

Unauthorised modification

Unlawful destruction or accidental loss"

Security of websites

As websites become more transactional, an increasing concern is that they must be secure. This is not an easy criteria to test in this survey, for two main reasons. Firstly, it is an extremely technical subject requiring very specialised expertise and, secondly, publishing results would significantly increase the risks of a security attack from hackers and the like.

A restricted test

Our approach has been to invite a company with the expertise (Hytec Information Security Ltd) to carry out a restricted test on 20 of the more advanced local authority websites. The test, conducted during December 2005, aimed to increase local authority awareness of website security deficiencies and of the risks from potential attackers. Its explicit objective was to identify whether security vulnerabilities existed, not to exploit them.

The councils assessed formed a representative sample of shire counties, shire districts, London boroughs and metropolitan districts. A detailed and confidential report of findings about each website has been provided to each of the local authorities assessed.

The risk

Prior to an attack, potential attackers will typically evaluate how vulnerable an organisation might be, and from the results will select the path of least resistance to achieve their desired effect. Their aim might be:

- to disable the service (a so-called 'denial of service' attack)

- to gather sensitive information

- to deface or change the content of a website

- to redirect users, without their knowledge, from the council's website to another site that usually has the same 'look and feel' in order to gather sensitive or commercial information

- to monitor activity to or from a site, by pretending to be the site (a so-called 'man-in-the-middle' attack).

The findings
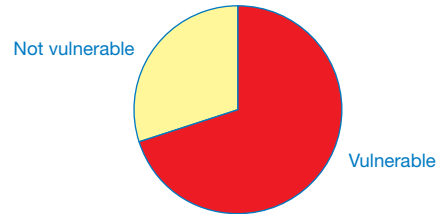
Chart 55 Councils vulnerable to attack

This chart shows that 14 councils in our test had at least one vulnerability that could be exploited by an attacker. In fact, this represents an improvement from a similar test carried out by Hytec in 2003 into 17 similar websites (not published by Socitm *Insight*). During the 2003 test, all sites reviewed were identified as having at least one serious vulnerability.
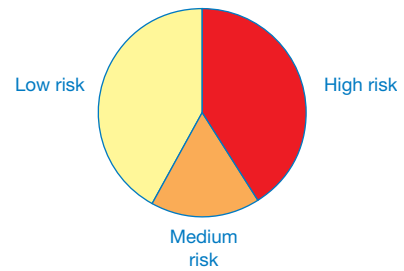
Chart 56a Profile of vulnerabilities (summary)
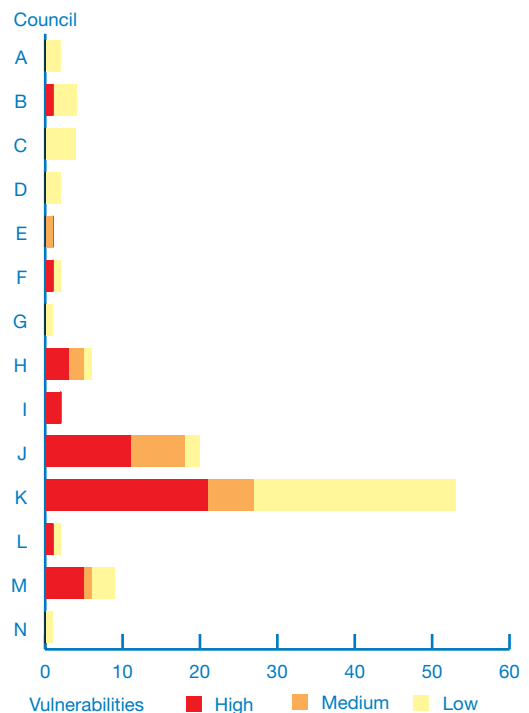
Chart 56b Profile of vulnerabilities (by council)

Many of the medium and high risk vulnerabilities highlighted opposite could potentially result in the total loss of the server. It might even be the case that some of the systems tested may have already been compromised in a non-obvious way.

The remedy

For local authorities, the biggest cause of vulnerability is the lack of maintenance of the different layers of system from the operating system to the full range of applications. In order to mitigate the risk, it is advisable to disable any services that are not required. For example, a default installation of Microsoft's IIS web server software will install many services, most of which will not be required, but these can become vulnerable if not constantly updated (or 'patched' in the technical jargon). Many of the vulnerabilities identified were in components of websites that were not required and had not been maintained.

New vulnerabilities are identified every day and openly published to the world. Potential attackers take an unhealthy interest in this information and, as a result, it is a constant task to keep systems protected. It is not possible to completely secure websites from attack. There will always be a threat from so-called 'day one' attacks, where a vulnerability has been identified but a patch or fix has not yet been released.

The likelihood of a vulnerability being exploited is, unfortunately, high. Through stealth scanning or direct connections to published web services, a skilled hacker will identify vulnerabilities within 45 minutes at most. An example might be where a configuration error results in what is called an 'open relay', which allows spammers, who will find this in less than 30 minutes, to flood organisations with spam e-mails within two hours.

In conclusion, all web-based services should be 'hardened' to resist the determined hacker. One effective way of achieving this is to remove all unnecessary software components and, to use the technical jargon, defend in depth!

Key messages

Resilience

- **Plan to reduce the technical errors on your site in order to improve the user experience.**

- **Consider taking a subscription to one of many link check services that are available.**

- **Aim to make your website available 100% of the time.**

- **Focus on the five different elements of home page performance as defined here.**

- **Provide evidence that will reassure visitors about trust, security and confidentiality.**

- **If not already present, insert a link to the Get Safe Online campaign.**

Security

- **Ensure that your system is secure from external attack.**

- **Remove all system components not actually required.**

- **Keep up to date with all system upgrades and 'patches' for those components that are required.**

- **Be vigilant and spread the word!**

Further information: **See Appendix 1 for results of survey See Appendix 11 for detailed results of survey (SiteMorse)**

If subscriber, visit *How did your council do?*, the subscriber-only area of www.socitm.gov.uk

Hacked off with hacker's jargon?

Information security has a specialist vocabulary of its own. Much of it has a strong military feel. Here are some of the more common terms that those who police websites might use in their war against internet attacks — not to mention their foes, the hackers.

Cross-site-scripting (XSS)
This occurs when a malicious web application gathers data from a user. The data is usually gathered in the form of a hyperlink that contains malicious content within it. The user will most likely click on this link from another website, instant message, or simply just read a web board or e-mail message.

Defence in depth (DID)
In terms of physical security this would be locks on the doors, CCTV, security guards, a safe for particularly sensitive data — all working together to provide 'defence in depth'. In terms of electronic information security, this can be provided by installing layers of different technologies such as anti-virus, firewalls, intrusion detection and encryption.

The technique is also used to describe the use of two different firewalls 'back to back' because it is much harder for an intruder to break through two firewalls than one.

De-militarised zone (DMZ)
This is a network area that sits between an organisation's internal network ('clean' or 'safe') and an external network ('dirty' or 'hostile'), usually, but not limited to, the internet.

Man-in-the-middle attack (MITM)
This occurs when an attacker is able to read, insert and modify at will messages between two parties without either party knowing that the link between them has been compromised.

Open relay
An open mail relay is a simple mail transfer protocol (SMTP) e-mail server such as Microsoft Exchange, which is configured in such a way that it allows anyone on the internet to relay (ie send) e-mail through it. Used by spammers as a method of propagation, internet service providers (ISPs) take a very dim view of this and usually disconnect offending organisations at short or no notice.

Ports
Every computer or device on the internet must have a unique number assigned to it called the internet protocol (IP) address. This is used to recognise your particular computer out of the millions of other computers connected to the internet. When information is sent over the internet to your computer, it accepts that information by using particular TCP or UDP ports.

An analogy for TCP/UDP ports is to imagine that an IP address is associated with a cable television box and the ports are the different channels on that cable box. The cable company knows how to send cable to your cable box, based upon a unique serial number associated with that box (IP address), and then you receive the individual shows on different channels, which are called ports.

Each IP address has a total of 65,535 TCP ports and another 65,535 UDP ports. When a program on your computer sends or receives data over the internet, it sends that data to an IP address and a specific port.

User datagram protocol (UDP)
This is one of the core protocols of the internet protocol suite. Using UDP, programs on networked computers can send short messages known as 'datagrams' to one another. UDP does not provide the reliability and ordering guarantees that TCP does; datagrams may arrive out of order or go missing without notice. However, as a result, UDP is faster and more efficient for many lightweight or time-sensitive purposes. Also, its stateless nature is useful for servers that answer small queries from huge numbers of clients.

For a detailed glossary of security terms, visit www.hytec.co.uk/information_glossary.html

Source: Hytec Information Security Ltd

Part E

This year's results — usage

Our third perspective is focused on usage. Switching from the product to the customer, we examine different aspects of the demand side, highlighting trends about usage. We provide the latest information about internet access, visitor usage, satisfaction and behaviour, culminating with advice about better promotion.

6 Usage

6.1 Context

As well as investigating in depth the usefulness and usability of the website as a product under development, we have investigated aspects of usage in greater depth, using a range of additional surveys and applying them to a simple framework of four criteria that we identified in *Better connected: aiming high*.

Access	Do people have easy free access to the internet (not forgetting access through intermediaries)?
Measurement	Are visitor numbers and interactions increasing?
Feedback	What do visitors think about their experience in using the site?
Promotion	Are websites being fully marketed to key audiences?

The framework outlined here allows us first to consider issues of access to the internet. This defines the scope of maximum usage at the current time. The wider the access, the larger the market for attracting to local government websites becomes (section 6.2).

Next we look at quantitative measures about the current take-up of websites in local government as a sector (section 6.3)

This is followed by two sets of a more focused analysis of qualitative data in a selective group of local authorities. The first of these examines what visitors say about the experience in a representative group of 46 councils (section 6.4). The second set of data investigates what visitors do in practice when visiting council websites and is based on a sample of six transactional websites from 2005, updating a similar investigation in last year's report (section 6.5).

Finally, we look briefly at the issue of promotion and provide an update of the e-citizen national project and a couple of other projects that have some useful lessons for everyone (section 6.6).

6.2 Access

Do people have easy free access to the Internet (not forgetting access through intermediaries)?

Source of evidence: Ipsos MORI Technology Tracker

Context
We need to start with an overview of what is happening nationwide in the development and take-up of the internet, as this clearly shapes the scope that local authorities have for influencing change in their communities. As before, we have used data from the Ipsos MORI Technology Tracker to help us understand the issues.

Use of the internet
The latest figures from Ipsos MORI show that now 61% of the GB adult population uses the internet (compared with 55% last year). 56% use the internet at home, broken down into 42% with access to broadband and 14% still using narrowband. Broadband, in fact, has grown rapidly and evenly for internet users at home from 14% in January 2004 to 28% in January 2005 and now in January 2006 to 42%.

The overall figures for use of the internet need also to be broken down by gender, age social grouping and region, shown in the charts that follow. It is also informative to analyse broadband separately from narrowband, because broadband should encourage greater use of the internet at least by those who have previously depended on narrowband connections. We have analysed here the use of the internet at home

There is still a gender gap in the use of the internet with 61% of men of the population using it compared with 52% of women.
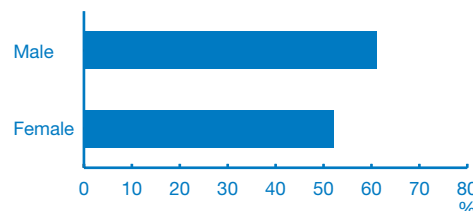
Chart 57 Use of internet by gender

Base: 4,257 GB adults aged 15+, MORI face-to-face Omnibus, January 2006

The analysis by age and social group confirms the existence of a 'digital divide'. Firstly, the age analysis shows that between 71% and 77% of those in the four age bands from 15-54 use the internet. The age divide occurs in later middle age with 54% of 55-64 year olds (47% last year) and 23% of those aged over 65 (18% last year) saying they use the internet. Although these are much lower figures than those shown for younger people, the numbers in these two bands for the oldest groups are increasing fast, partly as internet users migrate to older age bands over the years.

Our next analysis looks at internet use by country and region. It is no surprise that people in the South are the highest users of the internet, but it may be more surprising that the figures for London are a little lower than for the Midlands and the North and only marginally higher than for Scotland and Wales. (Note that this data is not available by the nine English regions individually, only in the three groups of regions.)

Chart 60 Use of internet by country and regional groups

Base: 4,257 GB adults aged 15+, MORI face-to-face Omnibus, January 2006

Chart 58 Use of internet by age

Base: 4,257 GB adults aged 15+, MORI face-to-face Omnibus, January 2006

Secondly, the analysis by social group reinforces the idea of the 'digital divide', because 76% of social group AB (senior managers and professionals) use the internet, but only 32% of social group DE (unemployed, semi-skilled or unskilled manual workers) do so, although this is an increase of 4% from last year.
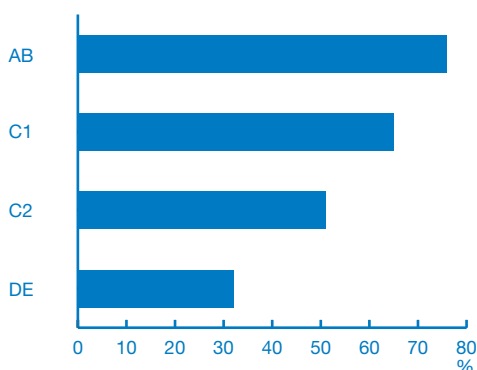
Chart 59 Use of internet by social group

Base: 4,257 GB adults aged 15+, MORI face-to-face Omnibus, January 2006

The growth of broadband has already been indicated as rapid. This third chart shows the degree of penetration by broadband by region. Compared with total coverage, the average broadband coverage across Great Britain is 75%, but this varies from London with 79% broadband to Wales with 65%. The cost of broadband can be relatively high, suggesting that those with broadband are experienced internet users, who see a need for high-speed access. Those who just use the internet for e-mail are unlikely to invest in broadband.

The final piece of information about internet access concerns use of mobile telephones. The latest figures show 84% of the whole population use a mobile phone (compared with 81% last year), ie much higher than internet use. This suggests that councils should look hard at exploiting the capabilities of mobile phones (eg texting e-mail prompts for information and services).

Further information: **www.mori.com**
                                    www.citizensonline.org.uk

6.3   Measurement

Are visitor numbers and interactions increasing?

Sources of evidence: Main survey
Website take-up service
Hitwise UK

Context

Information about internet use provides the national context for understanding the critical question about use of online services involving the local government sector. Local authorities are under great pressure to demonstrate that the investments they have made in 'e-government' really are starting to achieve the desired result of transforming public services. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) has spelt out exactly what is expected of councils in England in terms of priority outcomes:

Priority area 13 — High take-up of web-based transactional services

"Monitoring of performance of corporate website, or regional web portal, between 2003/4 and 2005/6, in order to demonstrate rising and substantial use, as measured by industry standards including page impressions and unique users."

Priority Services and Transformational Outcomes (ODPM, April 2004).

By April 2006, all local authorities will be expected to have established internal targets and measures for customer take-up of e-enabled access channels, while authorities working to stretch targets will have agreed baseline and take-up targets for migration of local authority business to e-access channels — including the web — and identified resulting efficiency savings.

In fact, efficiency reviews for all councils across the UK are likely to bring into scrutiny the potential to switch business from expensive methods of delivering services (face to face, letter, and phone) to cheaper, self-service options available on the council website. Success in achieving such efficiencies can only be evaluated if meaningful web visitor statistics are being collected and monitored on an ongoing basis.

There is also every likelihood that CPA inspectors are asking similar questions about the effectiveness of local e-government implementations, as measured through a range of service outcome indicators including website take-up.

Methodology

Each local authority will seek to understand the patterns of traffic to its website; this is no easy task, because it is fraught with technical difficulties about the definition of usage and agreement about appropriate levels. This is not a task that we can analyse in great detail, because we do not have available the local website statistics in a consistent format that would enable us to compare across councils in the way that we can assess useful content and usability.

We do have, however, some valuable information about website usage from three sources that helps to build up a reliable picture about general trends. Each source provides information at a different level as outlined in the table below.

	Source	Level	Information	Trends
1	Main survey	Local authority website	Statistics as defined by those councils that have made information available on website	Not applicable
2	Website take-up service	60 councils in Socitm *Insight* website take-up service	Monthly unique visitors as calculated by Nielsen//NetRatings software	Estimate of national usage based on 100% data from 46 councils
3	Hitwise UK	Local government sector	Full analysis of local government market share for each council in UK	Councils with comparatively high and low levels of take-up

Main survey

Q85 Can I find out recent visitor statistics for the site?

Q86 Can I find recent site availability statistics?
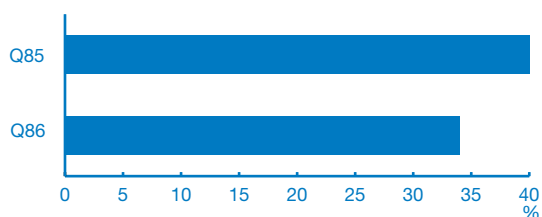
Chart 61 Publicly-available web statistics

Our reviewers looked for information on council websites about their statistics and found that 40% published statistics about visitors and 34% about site availability. We did find some examples of good practice. Three that caught our attention were Chester City, Northamptonshire CC and Tameside MBC.

Website take-up service

The Socitm *Insight* website take-up service analyses visitor feedback about council websites. The system used also captures information about the total numbers of visitors each month. Just fewer than 2,400,000 visitors came to 46 council sites in December 2005. If we extrapolate these figures across the UK by type of council, then we can estimate that 12.5m visitors came to local authority websites that month, amounting to about 20% of the population.
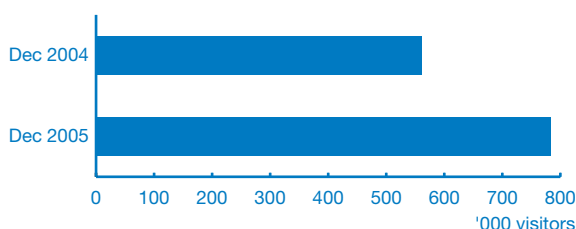
Chart 62 Increase in visitors over 12 months (sample of 19 councils)

If we compare the total number of visitors received by 19 councils in December 2004 with the number received by the same 19 councils 12 months later, there has been a 40% increase in the number of visitors. This is a 4% sample of local government — good enough to suggest that these figures apply across the sector.

Hitwise service

For the past three years we have used a specialist company (Hitwise UK) to provide us with an overview of local authority website usage. Hitwise monitors approximately 8.4 million UK internet users daily and specialises in providing information on the relative usage of over 500,000 websites in over 160 markets. Extracting data directly from ISPs, Hitwise aims to provide a representative view of UK internet usage.

We have used data from the Hitwise 'local government category' which incorporates UK local authority websites. The data shows the market share of all visits secured by each local authority in January 2005. A visit refers to a single user accessing a website and viewing pages from that website without any period of inactivity of 30 minutes. We have produced a table of Top 20 websites using the Hitwise data, and in addition a second Top 20 that takes into account the relative size of the authority by applying a population weighting to compare the number of visits per head of population.

Changes in 12 months (unweighted data from Hitwise)

Top 20 local authority websites by market share of visits			
	January 2005	**January 2006**	**Change**
1	Hampshire CC	Hampshire CC	No change
2	Birmingham City	Hertfordshire CC	+18
3	Devon CC	Birmingham City	-1
4	Aberdeen City	Devon CC	-1
5	Suffolk CC	Aberdeen City	-1
6	Manchester City	Manchester City	No change
7	Cornwall CC	Durham CC	+5
8	Lancashire CC	Lancashire CC	No change
9	Milton Keynes	Cheshire CC	+4
10	Newcastle upon Tyne City	Milton Keynes	-1
11	Leeds City	Newcastle upon Tyne City	-1
12	Durham CC	Warwickshire CC	+2
13	Cheshire CC	Leeds CC	-2
14	Warwickshire CC	Edinburgh City	+1
15	Edinburgh City	Cardiff County	New
16	Nottingham City	Glasgow City	+2
17	Bristol City	Aberdeenshire CC	New
18	Glasgow City	Derbyshire CC	New
19	Surrey CC	Surrey CC	No change
20	Hertfordshire CC	Suffolk CC	-15

Chart 63 Market share of usage (changes in 12 months)

Analysis

If we just compare the data supplied by Hitwise, there is much consistency between the two years with 17 sites appearing in both lists. Points to note include:

- Hampshire CC still receives, by a significant margin, the biggest market share of hits as it has over the last three years, but this time the gap has narrowed considerably.

- Hertfordshire CC has a major increase of share.

- Suffolk CC sees a major drop in share.

- Only two other councils (Cheshire CC, Durham CC both up) move up or down by more than two places.

- Three new councils appear.

Changes in 12 months (weighted by population)

Top 20 local authority websites by market share of visits

	January 2005	January 2006	Change
1	Corporation of London	Corporation of London	No change
2	Rutland CC	Rutland CC	No change
3	Aberdeen City	Isles of Scilly	+4
4	Western Isles	Orkney Islands	+11
5	Milton Keynes	Shetland Islands	+6
6	Cambridge City	Suffolk CC	New
7	Isles of Scilly	Aberdeen City	-4
8	Isle of Wight	Western Isles	-4
9	Dundee City	Milton Keynes	-4
10	Newcastle upon Tyne City	Isle of Wight	-2
11	Shetland Islands	Lincoln City	+1
12	Lincoln City	Wrexham CBC	+1
13	Wrexham CBC	Newcastle upon Tyne City	-3
14	Aberdeenshire	Weymouth & Portland BC	New
15	Orkney Islands	Aberdeenshire	-1
16	Stirling	Clackmannanshire	New
17	Westminster	Highland	New
18	Manchester City	City of York	New
19	Herefordshire	Herefordshire	No change
20	Nottingham City	Tameside MBC	New

Chart 64 Weighted market share of usage (changes in 12 months)

When market share is weighted by population, there is greater change over the year in these lists, but the two lists are still significantly similar with 14 sites appearing in both years. It seems that councils with a well-established and well-used web presence have little difficulty sustaining their levels of traffic.

Last year we had several obviously rural new entrants (Shetland Isles, Aberdeenshire, Orkney Islands, Herefordshire and the Isles of Scilly) which have been joined by another one (Highland). This suggests a boost of usage by people in remote rural areas, perhaps stimulated by the spread of broadband.

It is also interesting to compare movements in the past year over the whole sector. Appendix 14 shows the top 100 who have moved the most places up this table. The councils that have made the most progress are those who have jumped up at least 100 places into the top 100. They comprise (in descending sequence of the biggest improvements):

	Local authority	Places moved up
1	Clackmannanshire	445 places to No 16
2	Flintshire CC	423 places to No 28
3	North Cornwall DC	380 places to No 77
4	North Ayrshire	314 places to No 30
5	Hertfordshire CC	292 places to No 41
6	Crewe & Nantwich BC	214 places to No 56
7	Norwich City	160 places to No 80
8	Harrogate BC	114 places to No 67
9	Gwynedd CC	111 places to No 45
10	Barrow-in-Furness BC	110 places to No 90

Chart 65 Councils with highest increases in weighted usage

It is important to acknowledge some limitations:

- The Hitwise methodology does not include any international traffic and, as a result, any councils that attract a disproportionately high percentage of overseas visitors may be understated by the Hitwise methodology.

- Our own method of weighting market share of visits by population excludes business usage, and so distorts figures for those councils with heavier than average business use (eg Corporation of London).

It is important, then, not to focus too much on the detailed data, but from it to identify trends of increased usage.

Key messages

- **Consider how your council performs from the data presented here in order to learn from others in similar councils.**

Further information: See Appendix 14 for results of survey and methodology (Hitwise)

6.4 Feedback — what visitors say

What do we know about visitors' experiences?

Source of evidence: Socitm *Insight* website take-up service (using Nielsen//NetRatings)

Context

Qualitative feedback is, in the long-term, much more important than quantitative measurement, but equally it is more difficult to obtain reliable feedback. Many visitors will leave sites immediately they encounter problems in finding the information or service they are looking for, preferring to try somewhere else, even though for some local authority business this might not be an option. Unless one can monitor very closely real user behaviour, as in usability testing sessions involving members of the public, web managers may not find it easy to learn exactly what causes those problems that send visitors away frustrated.

Methodology

One reliable way of finding out what users think of the experience is to ask them to complete a short survey at the end of their visit. For the past 18 months we have been able to use data from our website take-up service launched during 2004. We summarise here information gathered from 46 councils in December 2005.

It updates information published in two earlier briefings:

- *Building usage of council websites* (Issue 1, December 2004)

- *Building usage of council websites* (Issue 2, August 2005)

Further details about the information summarised here will be found in Issue 3 of this half-yearly briefing (planned for March 2006).

The purpose of the survey is to learn more about exactly how many people use council websites: who they are, what they use them for, where they come from and how satisfied they were with the service offered. The 46 councils are a representative range of local authorities from large to small, urban to rural.

They comprise:

- 7 shire counties

- 18 shire districts

- 5 London boroughs

- 6 metropolitan districts

- 6 English unitaries

- 1 Welsh unitary

- 3 Scottish unitaries

The sites comprise 17 **T** sites, 18 **C+** sites and 11 **C** sites (a sample that has 15% higher *Better connected* ratings than the average rating for all councils). The results analysed here come from survey replies from over 2,500 visitors. This is a large number of survey respondents and provides strong evidence of what visitors think of council websites.

The survey asks nine questions and takes about two minutes to complete. Supporting software collects the answers and analyses results in a variety of ways, allowing subscribers to look at findings from their own website and compare them with findings from the rest of the subscriber group. The full list of questions asked is set out in Appendix 5.

Key findings

- Over 2,500 surveys were completed in December 2005 from 2,392,808 visitors to 46 council websites. We estimate from this that around 10.6m visitors came to local authority websites across the UK during this month: about 15% of the population.

- Job vacancies are the most frequent reason for visiting council websites quoted in 18% of cases, compared with 11% for 'just browsing' and 6% for planning applications.

- In 26% of cases they arrive after using a search engine like Google, rather than as a result of a promotional campaign; 18% of cases arrive after being recommended to do so by a council employee; 18% enter the site having guessed the address, and another 18% having been redirected from another site. This leaves a maximum of 20% arriving as a result of a direct promotion of one sort or another (eg council literature).

- The profile of visitors includes 33% who are local residents, 22% who work in the area and 22% who work for the council.

- 80% of visitors are in the age range of 26-55, with 10% under 26 and 10% over 55.

- 61% of visitors are female (4% more than 12 months earlier).

- In 83% of cases visitors find the information they are looking for, or at least part of it. In comparison with last year's figures, this amounts to an overall improvement of 5%.

- When asked about their satisfaction with the clarity of presentation of the information, visitors give a net satisfaction rating of 63.9 percentage points, which represents again an improvement of just over 5%.

- Just under 84% expressed the likelihood of the website being their first port of call in future compared with just under 7% who did not. In comparison with one year previously, this is an improvement of 3%.

Overall, this data reinforces the view that most people who use council websites do so for a variety of reasons, like the experience and are keen to repeat it. The key message is to encourage more people to make that first visit.

Key messages

- **Find out as much as you can about who visits your website, why and how often.**

- **Find out as much as you can about the experience they had in visiting your website.**

- **Build their views into your improvement plans.**

Further information: See Appendix 5 for the detailed results (Website take-up service) See briefings entitled *Building usage of council websites* (Socitm *Insight*, Issues No 1, 2 and 3)

If subscriber, visit *How did your council do?*, the subscriber-only area of www.socitm.gov.uk

Rushcliffe BC
A page of compliments received by the council…
The first was quite amusing: 'I requested copies of Building Regulation documents earlier in the week. These turned up this morning, 2 to 3 days after the request. All very well, but I am now denied a prolonged whinge in the pub tonight at your expense. In future, kindly fulfil the local authority stereotype of unhelpful delay and bureaucracy. Making the process polite, effortless and near instantaneous has left me feeling disoriented. Top marks, anyway.'

6.5   Feedback — what visitors do

What do we know about visitors' experiences?

Source of evidence: speed-trap analysis of five
                       websites

Context

Feedback about what visitors think of the experience is valuable but needs to be supported by evidence about what they do during their visit. Enthusiastic and supportive website users who complete surveys are prepared to give us their views, but we need to know about the significant proportion of visitors who may leave the site unsatisfied and, as a result, may not return. We need to understand the website behaviour of those casual, often inexperienced users who never complete the transaction they start.

Methodology

How can we improve the experience of those who fail to find what they are looking for? The survey described here, based on the speed-trap product called *Prophet e-Gov Intelligence,* provides such a mechanism for objective analysis of usability without the need for visitors to answer surveys. Repeating some of last year's testing, we used this product again this year with another group of five local authorities that agreed to take part. As last year, those invited are all assessed as transactional sites:

- Cotswold DC

- East Ayrshire

- Exeter City

- Kensington & Chelsea

- Salford City

The product identifies the most popular features of the home page as demonstrated by looking at the actual mouse clicks made by users and from this produces so-called 'click maps'.

Analysis

The click maps provide a highly visual way of picking out the 'hot topics', which can then be followed up with some in-depth analysis from the *Prophet e-Gov Intelligence* system. However, in this brief study, we chose to restrict ourselves to a broad overview. The responses from the web managers at the sites selected for this test made for some very positive comments (see below).

There were limitations to this exercise. For example, news items are often dynamic and a click map would normally only run for the length of time that a page is static. As a result, there is some scattering of 'clicks' around news item areas. 'Click' results may also be slightly inaccurate if the user has their text size set to anything other than the default. Nevertheless, we were able to make some interesting observations.

Although the click maps are useful for plotting how people actually use the layout and navigation of a web page, the data it provides should always be used in conjunction with other resources such as web visitor feedback, web visitor statistics, customer satisfaction surveys, and other techniques such as designing the home page with usability as a given rather than an afterthought. The click map cannot be viewed in isolation, because that might distort the outcomes.

One of the five councils, Kensington & Chelsea, also took part in last year's survey, which showed that visitors to the site were only using the top navigation links, thus making most of the home page redundant. This led the council to redesign the home page and the results from the most recent click map clearly indicate that the decision to redesign was correct. Information is now far more easily available directly from the home page and confirms that the use of 'Quick Links' is a popular method of access to services (which also supports messages from last year's survey).

Comments from four website managers at the sites used in this test

It's a great eye opener and really reveals the trends.

The click map is another tool in the web manager's locker that, when used alongside web log statistics, user tracking, usability research and good principles of human-computer interface design, can enable the web manager to create an interface that enables the person using the website rather than obstructing them.

We are pleased that it seems to confirm our expectations for the design of our navigation. The most clicks are where we would have expected them to be — ie on our 'Search box', 'Links' across the top and 'Quick Links' down the side.

We'll be embarking on a redesign of the home page in April, so the information from speed-trap will be put to good use very swiftly.

It is clearly apparent that the search function is also a very important access point from this home page as well as 'Quick Links'. 'Online Service' and 'Forms' are also popular, suggesting that it was worth placing the links in a prime position.

On the other hand, the click map shows that the 'What's New' feature is not generally as popular as the 'Features' link and, as a result, Kensington & Chelsea is now going to review the case for reversing the order of priority.

Key messages

- **Consider carefully the length of the home page as an important issue if it is not obvious that users should scroll down, particularly if new to the internet.**

- **Use click maps to identify redundant areas, rationalise the home page and prevent it becoming excessively long.**

- **Do not bury icons such as Directgov right at the bottom of the page, with no description, where they do not attract much attention.**

- **Understand the point that visitors seem to favour links which are textual rather than graphical.**

- **Exploit the fact that visitors make at least as much use of the navigational features such as 'Quick find', as they do of the search facility.**

- **Use the council address or news headline as a link to further content.**

- **Ensure that the site has a dedicated online services section, as visitors appear to be making good use of e-services.**

- **Use items of news and consultation as important sources of local information to encourage people to return to the site.**

- **In general, find out as much as you can about what actually happens when people visit your website, especially those who seem to leave quickly without finding what they want.**

- **Find out how they arrive and the path they follow, including the use of navigational aids such as search engines and A to Z lists of services.**

Further information: See Appendix 15 for the detailed results (speed-trap)

That part of the image enclosed by the dotted line indicates the part of the page most usually seen on initial viewing.

This example of Kensington & Chelsea's home page shows the current pattern of usage. Areas shown in red indicate the 'hot spots' of usage, ie the greatest concentration of 'mouse clicks' by visitors — the redder they are, the greater the usage.

The click maps, from the five local authorities taken as a whole, highlighted a number of key messages.

6.6 Promotion

Are websites being fully marketed to key audiences?

Source of evidence: Market research from **e-citizen** national project

Context

There is little doubt that everyone's priorities should now be to build up take-up of the online facilities that have cost so much time and money to implement. This is symbolised by the campaign being prepared in England by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) for the first half of 2006.

Building take-up has already been an important topic raised in our reports of the last two years. One of the key messages from the Socitm *Insight* website take-up service is the need to promote the benefits of marketing websites more effectively, because the experience is generally positive for those who do use them. Last year we were able to reproduce the just completed executive summary of the most important piece of market research that has ever been carried out in the UK into issues of take-up and promotion of local authority e-channels. This research came from the **e-citizen** national project, led by Norwich City Council.

Methodology

Our annual survey itself can do little to inform this perspective on building usage. Many councils should learn much more about the impact of promotion from the national campaign that builds on the work of the **e-citizen** national project, but some lessons are emerging from other activities.

In this section we provide a brief update on the work of the national project but also report on two other pieces of work that are of interest.

Analysis
E-citizen national project

The project launched in April 2005 the results of a major piece of market research. Broadly its conclusions were twofold.

Firstly, it confirmed the opportunity for encouraging people to use local e-government facilities. As in our website take-up service, the evidence shows that most people who are using council websites like the experience and are keen to repeat it. The key message is to encourage more people to make that first visit. If people find the information and trust the website, they might also choose more often the self-service options. Building on those points, its main finding was:

The research shows that up to 46% of the adult population of England are ready and waiting to use local authority e-channels. There is huge potential, with an untapped market of 17.5 million e-citizens. It also shows that local authorities in England are in a good position to tap in to this potential and drive take-up of their e-channels. They will be able to achieve this through targeting citizens who already embrace e-commerce and e-communications.

The second broad conclusion is that the next step of encouraging people to go online is best implemented by focusing on specific transactions for specific groups of people using specific approaches of marketing, rather than making it a general campaign. The national project then tackled 13 mini-projects to test the proof of concept of the targeting of likely groups of people. The results can be found on www.e-citizen.gov.uk. The table below lists these studies.

Both conclusions benefit every local authority in the UK, not just those in England, because they represent an investment that councils could not make for themselves.

	Council	Application	Channel	Audience
1	Norwich City (Intermediary)	Fast track information	Internet	80 employees of the Citizen's Advice Bureau.
2	Norwich City	In the city	Internet	City centre residents
3	Gravesham BC	Abandoned vehicle text reporting	SMS	Under 35 A B C1
4	Medway	Jobs match	Internet	Under 35 A B C1 females
5	Oldham MBC (Intermediary)	Fact sheets	Internet	Organisations which access local authority e-channels
6	Oldham MBC	Fact sheets	Internet	ABC1 C2DE females with internet access
7	Canterbury City	Benefits calculator	Internet	Under 35 C2 D males and females
8	Thanet DC	e-payments	Internet	16-34 year olds
9	Nottinghamshire CC	Youth zone online	Internet	11-18 year olds
10	DC in East Lancashire	Feedback online	Internet	16-25 males and females
11	Norfolk CC	Library services online	Internet	Retired 55+ males and females
12	Shepway DC	Street Scene	Internet	ABC1 females
13	e@syconnects	Jobs online	Internet	Under 35 unemployed

The 13 proof of concept studies Source: www.e-citizen.gov.uk

A major success story

Whilst this national project has been completing its work, clearly some councils have been learning from other activities. One very good example is the success of online school admissions from Hertfordshire CC and other education authorities such as Bristol City.

In 2005 Hertfordshire achieved 64% of all secondary school admissions online, ie only one in three parents used the old paper-based scheme. A leader in this field for a few years, and as a result the lead authority on the national project for online schools admissions, the council saw a major surge in take-up during 2005. The most interesting point in the story is how it achieved this surge of interest.

The education service undertook some market research among parents and found that they were not aware of the online school admissions facility. Even though the scheme was mentioned in the booklet for parents, the reference came at the end and the focus was on the paper form that had to be completed. The design of the booklet was radically changed so that it became an introduction to the online service.

This improvement was matched by a couple of others. Firstly, the online system was subject to some form of user testing among employees of the council (who were also parents) as a result of which the design of the system was improved. Secondly, the admissions team engaged the support of head teachers in promoting the service because it realised that there were some administrative benefits to the school in avoiding some of the hassle with parents caused by the paper-based scheme.

Finally, parents themselves realise the benefit from the online system in that they receive the results of the decision some 48 hours earlier because it is sent by e-mail. Some councils might have difficulty in supporting this on the grounds that it might be seen as an unfair advantage for parents who are online. However, for this group of customers it should be possible, by securing the collaboration of schools, to ensure that all parents have online access for this purpose.

The lessons for every council are clear, not just for education authorities and not just about school admissions:

● Carry out some market research among those who might use the service.

● Examine all the promotional literature and methods in detail.

● Ensure that the online option is clearly promoted, and, if necessary, demonstrated to potential users, intermediaries and decision-influencers.

● Engage with intermediaries who can help to ensure that people in the key customer groups affected can get online access for this purpose (in this case the schools themselves).

● Test out the transaction with users (using appropriate council employees may be a good idea).

● Work with all those who are impacted by the transaction (in this case headteachers) and who are in a position to influence the customer group.

● Work with any other internal or stakeholder groups who are in a position to influence, positively or negatively, the customer group or those who might influence the customer group.

● Identify all the benefits to the group that is targeted.

This success story shows that the costs of making such improvements, which will lead to increased take-up, need not at all be high and that a much clearer viewer of the benefits should emerge. Increased take-up is not in itself a benefit.

The Community Information Line

This is an e-innovations project sponsored by the ODPM, also known as 'Rural eChampions', which examines the potential for engagement with local e-government at a grassroots level in North Cornwall, through the use of community volunteers who act as local interfaces for electronic service delivery methods.

The assumption tested in this project is that service providers are very clear about the potential for service delivery, but have reservations whether local communities have the enthusiasm, or even the knowledge, to be able to exploit this potential. As service consumers, citizens are currently not engaged with the concept, and do not realise the potential benefit it could afford to them. Both are concerned about the amount of money and resource expended upon this strategy over the last three years.

The report's conclusions are summarised as follows:

The Community Information Line adopts a different approach to engagement compared with traditional mass media approaches. This model was evaluated over the first year of the project, and can demonstrate:

1 The potential for e-government in rural areas is hampered by technical infrastructure. While over 99% of the country may have broadband access, the most isolated, and therefore needy, areas do not.

2 Communities are not aware of the potential benefits of e-government both personally and for their communities.

3 Once made aware, citizens are generally positive and engage with the concept.

4 Citizens do not become aware through mass media communication. They need to realise the potential through demonstration and discussion with someone whose opinion they respect.

5 There are different models of engagement with of overall method — citizens lacking the requisite knowledge to use the technology directly can be walked through with a suitably trained volunteer, whereas more ICT aware people tend to use a face to face method to become aware, and then complete the interface themselves with their own equipment.

Community Information Line — An evaluation of citizen engagement in local e-government

This project shows the importance of other approaches to building usage of local e-government; approaches that others have also tested. Two such examples have been captured in the Socitm *Insight* publication analysing case studies of transformation:

- **Community e-champions** from Sunderland City Council

- **Annual Hantsweb awards** from Hampshire CC

Both these initiatives are aimed at stimulating interest and enthusiasm in the community, which will indirectly lead to greater take-up.

Key messages

- **Maximise the investment from the e-citizen national project for your organisation.**

- **Apply marketing principles for each different online service.**

- **Recognise that much of the marketing effort needs to be spent internally, with people in your own organisation, who may oppose promotion of website take-up.**

- **Learn as much as you can about successes of others, and their different approaches.**

Further information: **Visit www.e-citizen.gov.uk Visit www.ncdc.gov.uk (North Cornwall DC) See *Modern public services: transformation in practice*, Socitm *Insight*, January 2006**

Part F

This year's results — supporting analyses

We also analyse the results from two additional perspectives. Firstly, we examine the extent to which the policy on priority services has been achieved in England. Secondly, we examine the evidence of true joined-up working, especially in two-tier parts of England.

7   Priority outcomes (England)

For councils in England, 2005 was dominated by the priority service outcomes. At the start of 2005 we reported with optimism that councils might just about be on target.

7.1   The detailed government policy

Our website survey is an excellent opportunity to see how English local authorities have progressed towards achieving the required outcomes (target for completion 31 December 2005) and the good outcomes (target for completion 31 March 2006). We are not able to provide evidence on all the indicators, only on those where the websites provide some evidence of progress. In total, we have been able to comment on 21 out of a possible 73 indicators (29%).

Level of outcome	Number	BC2006 evidence
Required outcomes	29	14
Good	25	7
Excellent	19	0
Total	**73**	**21**

The rest of this section reports on what we have found, service by service, and offers some conclusions.

The table above shows which indicators we are able to report on for each service. For the purposes of this analysis we have referred explicitly to:

- all indicators for **required outcomes** whether or not we have any evidence (the indicators in brackets in the table are those where the survey gives no evidence)

- only those indicators for **good or excellent outcomes** where we do have some evidence.

If we look beyond these dates, then the new Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) regime in England has built the results from the priority outcomes policy into CPA. The CPA guidance now includes 'Key Lines of Enquiry for Corporate Assessment' that contains the following statement in the 'Capacity' section supported under the heading of 'Inspection Focus' and under the heading for 'Criteria for Judgement' in Levels 2 and 3 by the need for evidence.

Extract

Key question

3.3   Does the council, with its partners, have the capacity it needs to achieve change and deliver its priorities?

Inspection Focus

- ICT resources and e-government are used to support delivery of priorities and greater choice for service users

Criteria for Judgement

The council has sufficient ICT resources to deliver its priorities. There is progress towards realising the benefits from e-government. Competencies for e-government-based change are embedded in the organisation. The council uses ICT to improve access to services. It has achieved the required priority outcomes for e-government, including the availability of online facilities at all times.

Source: *CPA: The Harder Way*
(Audit Commission, 2005)

Priority areas	Required outcomes	Good outcomes
1 Schools	R1, (R2)	
2 Community information	R3, (R4)	G2
3 Democratic renewal	(R5), R6	
4 Local environment	R7, R8	G5
5 E-procurement	R9	
6 Payments	(R10), (R11)	G11
7 Libraries, sports and leisure	R12, (R13)	
8 Transport	(R14), R15	G14
9 Benefits	(R16), (R17)	
10 Support for vulnerable people	R18, (R19)	
11 Supporting new ways of working	(R20), (R21), (R22)	
12 Accessibility of services	R23, R24	G20, G21
13 High take-up of web-based transactional services	(R25), R26	G23
14 Making it easy for citizens to do business with the council	(R27), R28. R29	

Although the priority outcomes policy applies just to England, councils in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland should find this of interest, in that most of the priority services listed reflect policy priorities outside England, both locally and nationally.

Notes

- In this assessment we refer specifically to responses from the 388 councils in England and exclude those from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

- We also refer on occasion to other publications:

  - *Better connected 2005* (February 2005)

  - *Defining e-government outcomes for 2005 to support the delivery of priority services and national strategy transformation agenda for local authorities in England*, Version 1.0 (ODPM, April 2004)

  - *Priority Outcomes: Explanatory Notes for Practitioners*, Version 1.0 (IDeA, September 2004)

  - *Survey of local authority websites from a business perspective, 2004* (ODPM, October 2004 — report prepared by Socitm *Insight*)

7.2 Progress against priority outcomes

Priority area 1   Schools

To help raise education standards and allow e-enabled processing of pupil support services to the public.

R1   Parents/guardians to apply online for school places for children for the 2007 school year. The admissions process starts about a year before the beginning of the school year, eg September 2006 for 2007 entry. (Owing to the long lead-in time, school admissions systems will need to be in place by March 2006 at the latest.)

Evidence of survey
We asked the question:

Q15 Can I apply for a school place online? (Keywords: school place, application)

45 local education authorities (including 1 in Wales) provide this facility (30% of the total in England) compared with 27 twelve months ago. Those LEAs that are county councils have made better progress than the rest (44% compared with 25%).

This is an annual process that takes place in the spring of each year. Unlike all the other required outcomes, the target date is effectively at least three months later than the official 31 December 2005.

Further information
See Sections 4.3 and 4.7 of this report

R2   Online facilities to be available to allow access to information about educational support services that seek to raise the educational attainment of Looked After Children ie: young people who cannot live with their families and are in the care of Social Services (referred to by the DfES as Children in Public Care)

Evidence of survey
The survey does not test this indicator.

Progress against outcomes
The remaining 70% of local education authorities will need to be implementing this facility in the first quarter of 2006 for this target to be achieved.

Priority area 2   Community information

To deliver integrated information about services for the community, delivered by local and regional partnerships where appropriate, and connected to a national infrastructure.

R3   Online facilities to be available to allow one-stop direct access and deep linking to joined-up A to Z information on all local authority services via website or shared telephone contact centre using the recognised taxonomy of the Local Government Category List (Authorities using alternative service taxonomies (eg seamlessUK) should plan for migration to the LGCL by December 2005)

Evidence of survey
We asked questions about searching for two common terms that appear in the LGCL (now the Integrated Public Service Vocabulary), showing that only 76 councils (20%) found both terms. This year we did not specifically ask about deep-linking and joined-up information with other agencies in respect of A to Z lists of services, but we did ask reviewers to rate them overall on a scale of 0 to 3. If we exclude those rated satisfactory (2) or very good (3), then this number reduces to 54, because those rated poor (1) or no information (0) are most unlikely to have those features. We can then deduce that that no more than 54 councils (14%) might be using LGCL with a joined-up A to Z list compared with our estimate of 10% last year based on a similar deduction.

Further information
See Sections 5.2 and 5.3 of this report

R4   Online facilities to be available to allow local authority and youth justice agencies to co-ordinate the secure sending, sharing of and access to information in support of crime reduction initiatives in partnership with the local community

Evidence of survey
The survey does not test this indicator.

G2 Empowering and supporting local organisations, community groups and clubs to create and maintain their own information online, including the promotion of job vacancies and events

Evidence of survey
In our main survey we asked this question:

Q38 Can external organisations submit new or revised information online for the community database? (excluding What's on events) (Keywords: community information, update, clubs, groups)

In response we found that 123 local authorities (32%) allow organisations to do this. This is spread relatively evenly across types of council. The question may not be quite the same as implied in the outcome indicator, in that it does not refer to information about jobs and events, but it is nonetheless a useful indicator of progress in this priority service.

Progress against outcomes
One of the two required outcomes suggests a long way to go, but the good outcome we have measured implies a reasonable degree of progress to the 31 March 2006 deadline.

Priority area 3   Democratic renewal

To promote greater public involvement in local decision-making, and to enhance the representative role of councillors in the community through the use of technology.

R5 Online facilities to be available to allow public access to reports, minutes and agendas from past council meetings, including future meetings diary updated daily

Evidence of survey
The survey does not test this indicator, but last year's indicator suggested that councils were well on the way to achieving this target.

Further information
See Section 7 of *Better connected 2005*

R6 Providing every councillor with the option to have an easy-to-manage set of public web pages (for community leadership purposes) that is either maintained for them, or that they can maintain themselves

Evidence of survey
We asked this question:

Q39 Can I access a personal web page for my local councillor? (Keywords: councillor, local councillor)

Some 57 councils (15%) provide personal web pages, just more than double the number identified last year.

Further information
See Section 4.5 of this report

G3 Citizen participation and response to forthcoming consultations and decisions on matters of public interest (e-consultation), including facility for citizens to sign up for e-mail and/or SMS text alerts on nominated topics

Evidence of survey
The survey does not test this indicator

Progress against outcomes
One of the two required outcomes should be met by all councils by the agreed deadline, but it looks very unlikely that the other will be achieved.

Priority area 4   Local environment

To help improve the quality cleanliness and safety of our public space by using technology to integrate relevant functions more closely.

R7   Public reporting/applications, procurement and tracking of environmental services, includes waste management and street scene (eg abandoned cars, graffiti removal, bulky waste removal, recycling)

Evidence of survey
We asked this question:

Q31 Can I report a pothole online?
       (Keyword: pothole)

We discovered that 113 top tier councils (75%) that are responsible for highways offer this transaction and 115 shire districts (48%) refer visitors to the county.

Further information
See Section 4.7 of this report

R8   Receipt and processing of planning and building control applications

In our main survey we asked this question:

Q33 Can I search the Planning Register online?

In all, 242 councils (62%) allow this facility, an increase of 50% in twelve months. Of those councils 16 are county councils referring visitors to shire districts. The replies to this question are not the same as the information specified in the outcome indicator in that having access to search the register is only a prerequisite to receiving and processing applications.

Further information
See Section 4.7 of this report

G5   Public access to corporate geographic information systems (GIS) for map-based data presentation of property-related information

Evidence of survey
We asked this question:

Q46 Is there information about roadworks in the area and where they are located on a map? (Keywords: roadworks, road works)

Although this is, strictly speaking, not a question about property-related information, it does test GIS capability. We found that 128 councils (33%) answered this question in the affirmative, compared with 24% last year who answered a similar question but worded differently.

Progress against outcomes
Approximately half of councils seem to have met the two required outcomes for the 31 December 2005 deadline, and one third have achieved the good outcome that others should achieve by 31 March 2006.

Priority area 5   E-procurement

To support business improvement through cost-effective and efficient purchasing of goods and services through corporate implementation of e-procurement. Working with local suppliers to equip them to take advantage of e-procurement activities.

R9   Appropriate e-procurement solutions in place, including as a minimum paperless ordering, invoicing and payment

Evidence of survey
We asked this pair of questions:

Q34 Can I submit a response to a tender online? (Keywords: tenders, tender opportunities)

Q35 Can I apply online to be considered for the council's approved list of suppliers? (Keywords: approved supplier)

We found that just 24 councils (5%) could offer the first facility and 42 (11%) the second facility. The questions only test two parts of the procurement process and one technical solution (others might include e-mail and e-marketplaces). Nevertheless, they reflect the council's attitude to potential new suppliers and are a useful indicator of progress being made.

Further information
See Section 4.7 of this report

G8   Establishment of a single business account (ie a cross-departmental 'account' run by the local authority whereby businesses are allocated a unique identifier that can be stored and managed via a corporate CRM account facility supporting face-to-face, website and contact centre transactions)

Evidence of survey
In our report commissioned by the national project for **Working with business** we found in October 2004 that information for business was relatively neglected with very little evidence of the joined-up thinking within the local authority that is necessary before a single business account can start to become a reality.

Further information
See Section 4 of *Survey of local authority websites from a business perspective, 2004* (ODPM, October 2004)

Progress against outcomes
The evidence presented here implies very clearly that the required outcome has not been achieved.

Priority area 6   Payments

To support service improvement and collection efficiency by providing for all payments to the council for goods and services to be made online or by telephone.

R10 Online facilities to be available to allow payments to the council in ways that engender public trust and confidence in local government electronic payment solutions (eg e-mail receipting/proof of payment, supply of automatic transaction ID numbers)

Evidence of survey
This year's survey does not test this indicator.

Last year we found that 75% of all councils (except county councils, which do not perform this function) allow online payments, but we were unable to test the payment facility itself, which would give the definitive answer for this outcome indicator.

Further information
See Section 4.8 of this report

R11 Online facilities to be available to allow delivery of 'added value' around online payment facilities, including ability to check council tax and business rate balances online or via touch-tone telephone dialling

Evidence of survey
The survey does not test this indicator.

G11 Registration for council tax and business rates e-billing for direct debit payers

Evidence of survey
We asked this question:

Q29 Can I request to receive my council tax bill electronically? (Keywords: council tax bill)

The results show that just 41 councils (11%) can handle such a request, an increase from just 7 councils last year. The ODPM guidance does allow for this outcome to be fulfilled via a mediated service to telephone or personal callers as well as on a self-service basis

Further information
See Section 4.7 of this report

Progress against outcomes
The achievement of this target depends on the way in which payments are handled in the back office, which our survey cannot test. We cannot assess progress with the first indicator and did not attempt to test the second one. However, the evidence from the good outcome target is that councils are very unlikely to achieve that by 31 March 2006 given the slow progress in the past twelve months.

Priority area 7   Libraries, sports and leisure

To provide easy and convenient access to a range of online information to encourage productive use of leisure time and healthier lifestyles, including e-enablement of local library, sports and leisure services.

R12 Online facilities to be available to allow renewal and reservations of library books and catalogue search facilities

Evidence of survey
As in 2004 and 2005, we asked this question:

Q27 Can I reserve or renew a library book? (Keywords: library book, reservation, renewal)

We found that 90% of library authorities (ie excluding shire districts) now provide this service (compared with 75% twelve months ago). We also found that 169 shire districts (71%) direct visitors to the county site (compared with 47% last year).

Further information
See Section 4.7 of this report

R13 Online facilities to be available to allow booking of sports and leisure facilities, including both direct and contracted-out operations

Evidence of survey
This year's survey does not test this indicator.

Last year we found that just 37 councils (10%) offered this facility.

Further information
See Section 4.7 of this report

Progress against outcomes
The required outcome for libraries has been achieved by 90% of library authorities (75% of the rest). We have no further information about the booking of facilities than the very low figures from last year.

Priority area 8   Transport

To meet transport needs more effectively through the provision of real-time local transport information and utilising technologies to improve traffic and transport management.

R14 The public to inspect local public transport timetables and information via available providing organisation, including links to 'live' systems for interactive journey planning

Evidence of survey
This year's survey does not test this indicator.

Last year we found that 80% of local authorities (80%) provide timetable information, but we did not check their use of 'live' systems, although in practice most of them will have access to that type of facility.

R15 Public e-consultation facilities for new proposals on traffic management (eg controlled parking zones (CPZs), traffic calming schemes), including publication of consultation survey results

Evidence of survey
We asked this question:

Q40 Is there evidence that the website is used to conduct online consultations?
(Keyword: consultation)

This is not specific to consultation about traffic issues, but gives an indication of the interest from councils in encouraging consultation. 220 councils (57%) offer this encouragement. Last year we found that 63 councils (16%) specifically offered an opportunity to comment on transport matters.

This year we also investigated discussion forums and found just 45 councils in England that have offered this.

Further information
See Section 4.5 of this report

G13 E-forms for 'parking contravention mitigation' (ie appeal against the issue of a penalty charge notice), including e-mail notification of form receipt and appeal procedures

Evidence of survey
This year's survey does not test this indicator.

Last year we found that 146 councils (38%) provide information about the procedures.

G14 GIS-based presentation of information on roadworks in the local area, including contact details and updated daily

Evidence of survey
We asked this question:

Q46 Is there information about roadworks in the area and where they are located on a map? (Keywords: roadworks, road works)

We found that 128 councils (33%) answered this question in the affirmative, compared with 24% last year who answered a similar question but worded differently.

Further information
See Sections 4.7 and 5.4 of this report

Progress against outcomes
The first of the two required outcomes was very well advanced last year, but progress with the other required outcome is well short of the target. We cannot comment on one of the two good outcomes, but the other one has certainly a long way to go in the short time now available.

Priority area 9   Benefits

To meet the needs of claimants and their agents through the provision of online access to the housing and council tax benefit claim process, or via intermediate technology in their homes.

R16 E-enabled 'one stop' resolution of housing and council tax benefit enquiries via telephone, contact centres, or via one-stop shops using workflow tools and CRM software to provide information at all appropriate locations and enable electronic working from front to back office

Evidence of survey
The survey does not test this indicator.

R17 Citizens or their agents to check their eligibility for and calculate their entitlement to housing and council tax benefit and to download and print relevant claim forms

Evidence of survey
This year's survey does not test this indicator.

Progress against outcomes
We are not able to comment on these two outcomes.

Priority area 10   Support for vulnerable people

To meet the needs of vulnerable children and adults and their carers by increasing the accessibility of services, offering quick, comprehensive assessments and reducing risk by improving communication and access to information between agencies.

R18 Comprehensive and dedicated information about access to local care services available over the web and telephone contact centres

Evidence of survey
We asked this question:

Q27 Can I request an appointment with a social worker online?
(Keywords: appointment, social worker)

21 councils (14%) with direct social care responsibilities offer this facility, which is a useful test of the state of online facilities in social care in local government, but does not in itself indicate that information about access to local care services is available. A further 77 shire districts (32%) point the way to the relevant county site.

Further information
See Section 4.2 of this report

R19 Remote web access or mediated access via telephone (including outside of standard working hours availability) for authorised officers to information about individual 'care packages', including payments, requests for service and review dates

Evidence of survey
The survey does not test this indicator.

Progress against outcomes
Our one piece of evidence does not suggest that councils have met this target.

Priority area 11   Supporting new ways of working

Active policy and practice enabling council members and staff to work from home or away from the office base.

R20 E-mail and internet access provided for all members and staff that establish a need for it

Evidence of survey
The survey does not test this indicator.

R21 ICT support and documented policy for home/remote working (teleworking) for council members and staff

Evidence of survey
The survey does not test this indicator.

R22 Access to home/remote working facilities to all council members and staff that satisfy the requirements set by the council's published home/remote working policy

Evidence of survey
The survey does not test this indicator.

Progress against outcomes
We have no evidence.

Priority area 12   Accessibility of services

All council services are supported outside standard working hours via the Internet or telephone contact centres.

R23 Self-service or mediated access to all council services outside standard working hours via the internet or telephone contact centres (ie available for extended hours outside of 9am-5pm Monday to Friday)

Evidence of survey
Our section on interactive applications containing 16 questions (almost all of which relate to this outcome) indicates that only 70 councils can satisfy half of the questions asked and that on average councils score just over 5 positive answers.

This is just a sample of a much broader range of transactions, but suggests that most local authorities have still a long way to go to achieve this outcome.

The other qualification to this salutary reminder is that we cannot test mediated access, only self-service, even though mediated access also depends on the electronic services being available in some form to those receiving the phone requests.

Further information
See Section 4.7 of this report.

R24 Implementation of a content management system (CMS) to facilitate devolved web content creation and website management

Evidence of survey
The survey itself does not test this indicator. However, we have been able use some data collected by the e-Government Register of software products maintained by the London Borough of Brent and used elsewhere in this report. This shows that 366 councils in England (94%) use such a system. (Five do not and we do not have information from another 17 councils.)

Further information
See Appendix 12 of this report

G20 Conformance with level AA of W3C Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) standards on website accessibility

Evidence of survey

With the help of the RNIB we have tested all websites in England for Level A conformance and found that 53 (14%) have reached this level (61 councils last year). Two of these councils (0.5%) have also reached Level AA conformance (none last year) and another three are close to the standard. Moreover, only 17 out of the 61 that reached Level A in 2005 have maintained that performance.

Further information

See Section 5.6 and Appendix 11 of this report.

G21 Compliance with Government Interoperability Framework (e-GIF), including the Government Metadata Standard (e-GMS)

Evidence of survey

The SiteMorse tests show that just 152 councils out of 388 (39%) seem to comply with e-GMS (part of e-GIF), compared with just 24 councils last year. This means that no more than this number can comply with e-GIF.

Further information

See Section 4.6 and Appendix 11 of this report

Progress against outcomes

All three outcomes are tough targets to achieve. In two cases much progress has been made in the past year, but in the third case (accessibility) hardly any council has made that difficult target (Level AA of WCAG 1.0) although some progress has been made to the intermediate target (Level A).

Priority area 13   High take-up of web-based transactional services

Development of web-based services as a major access channel for interactions between the citizen and the council.

R25 Publication of internet service standards, including past performance and commitments on service availability

Evidence of survey

The survey does not test this indicator.

R26 Monitoring of performance of corporate website, or regional web portal, between 2003/04 and 2005/06 in order to demonstrate rising and sustained use, as measured by industry standards including page impressions and unique users

Evidence of survey

We asked the question:

Q85 Can I find out recent visitor statistics for the site? (Keywords: site statistics, website statistics)

From this we found that 179 councils (46%) publish these statistics, compared with just 13% last year. Others may monitor performance, but not publish the results. This question, however, does confirm that at least this number of councils treat monitoring seriously enough to publish them.

Our website take-up service, which some 50 councils in England used in December 2005, has some very good information about unique visitors and what they think of the experience of using council websites.

Further information

See Sections 6.3 and 6.4 of this report

G23 Adoption of recognised guidelines for usability of website design

Evidence of survey

As explained in Section 5.9, our survey provides a very good insight into the state of usability of council websites, although not able to test explicitly for compliance against the much more detailed LAWs guidelines to which the IDeA's *Explanatory Notes for Practitioners* refers them. Although we cannot provide firm evidence for this indicator, there are, like last year, some significant weaknesses in most sites (eg use of A to Z list of services, use of search engines).

Further information

See Section 5 of this report

Progress against outcomes

We have no evidence about one required outcome, but the evidence from the other is that despite more than a trebling of results, councils are still well short of the target here.

Priority area 14   Making it easy for citizens to do business with the council

Systems are in place to ensure effective customer relationship management.

R27 Systems in place to ensure effective and consistent customer relationship management across access channels and to provide a 'first time fix' for citizen and business enquiries, ie using a common database, which holds customer's records, to deliver services across different channels, and enabling joined-up and automated service delivery

Evidence of survey

The survey does not test this indicator.

R28 All e-mail and web form acknowledgements to include unique reference number allocated to allow tracking of enquiry and service response

Our sample e-mail test confirms that no more than 20 councils have this tracking mechanism, actually slightly lower than last year.

R29 100% of e-mail enquiries from the public responded to within one working day, with documented corporate performance standards for both e-mail acknowledgements and service replies

The IDeA's *Explanatory Notes for Practitioners* interprets a response as being an initial acknowledgement rather than a full reply. Our e-mail test showed that 185 councils (48%), compared with 181 councils (47%) last year, responded within one day. Another 74 sent an acknowledgement within 24 hours, but 29 of these councils failed to reply. In total, we can say that 255 councils (66%), compared with 242 councils (62%) last year, did respond, but 29 of did not reply, having sent an acknowledgement.

Further information

See Section 4.8 of this report

Progress against outcomes

Our sample test is just one e-mail from which we should not draw too many conclusions, although the performance has improved just marginally from last year. However, the number of councils with tracking mechanisms is low, confirming that this target has not been achieved for e-mail.

7.3   Achievement against targets

Summary of progress

The evidence that we have been able to collect suggests a mixed picture about the achievement of these targets for 31 December 2005 (required outcomes) and 31 March 2006 (good outcomes) which is summarised below:

	Priority outcomes	Indicative progress (Dec 2004)	Achievement of target (Dec 2005)
1	Schools	Evidence at this stage not firm	30% complete; much to be done in three months
2	Community information	Difficult to predict	Required outcome well short; much to be done for good outcome
3	Democratic renewal	One very likely, the other very unlikely to be achieved	One required outcome may well have been achieved, but the other certainly falls well short
4	Local environment	Just about on target	Both required outcomes approx 50% short; one good outcome still has long way to go
5	E-procurement	Unlikely to be achieved	Has not been achieved
6	Payments	A long way to go	No more evidence about required outcomes, but good outcome seems a long way off target
7	Libraries, sports and leisure	One very likely, the other very unlikely to be achieved	One 90% achieved; no recent evidence about the other
8	Transport	One indicator well advanced but a long way to go on the other three	No more evidence on two indicators, but patchy progression on the others
9	Benefits	A long way to go on one of the two indicators	No more evidence in this survey
10	Support for vulnerable people	Probably on target to achieve one of the two indicators	Little progress on the one indicator that can be tested
11	Supporting new ways of working	Not tested by this survey	Not tested by this survey
12	Accessibility of services	One indicator almost certainly will not be achieved and there is a long way to go on the other two	Good progress on one indicator, but short of target. Very poor progress on the other
13	High take-up of web-based transactional services	Difficult to predict	Moderate progress on one indicator; poor progress on the other
14	Making it easy for citizens to do business with the council	A long way to go on one of two indicators	No evidence of any real progress

Chart 66 Summary of progress against outcomes

In eleven cases the evidence is strongly circumstantial, rather than completely accurate, but in ten cases there is a precise fit between the outcome and the question in our survey. The chart opposite shows how well these outcomes have been achieved.

Note 1   Although this is a required outcome, local education authorities have a little leeway because of the processing cycle of the academic year.

Note 2   The target date is 31 March 2006 and the survey was carried out in November/December 2005 with 3 to 4 months to go, except for G20 that was completed in February.

Priority area	Outcome	Question in BC2006	'Required' targets
Schools	R1	Q15	30% (Note 1)
Democratic renewal	R6	Q39	15%
Local environment	R7	Q31	75%
Libraries, sports and leisure	R12	Q27	90%
Accessibility of services	R24	CMS survey	94%
High take-up of web-based transactional services	R26	Q85	46%
			'Good' targets (Note 2)
Community information	G2	Q38	32%
Payments	G11	Q29	11%
Transport	G14	Q46	33%
Accessibility of services	G20	RNIB survey	0.5%

Chart 67 Specific achievement against outcomes

Profile of performance

We have reported on 21 priority outcomes where we have clear 'Yes/No' evidence that can be recorded against each local authority. If we analyse this data, we can show in the following bands the number of councils that answer positively to our tests on priority service outcomes.
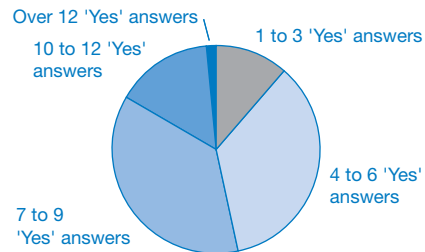
Chart 68 Progress of priority outcomes

It is quite noticeable that of the 42 councils that have scored just 1 to 3 'Yes' answers, all are shire districts, except for one metropolitan district and four unitaries. On the other hand, those 64 which are doing best with over 10 or more 'Yes' answers do include 25 shire districts.

Examples of good practice

(ie with at least 12 out of 21 'Yes' answers)

- Devon CC   (14 'Yes' answers)
- Shropshire CC   (14 'Yes' answers)
- Brent   (13 'Yes' answers)
- East Sussex CC   (13 'Yes' answers)
- Leicester City   (13 'Yes' answers)
- Surrey CC   (13 'Yes' answers)
- Wiltshire CC   (13 'Yes' answers)
- Woking BC   (13 'Yes' answers)
- Derbyshire CC
- Durham CC
- Guildford BC
- Leicestershire CC
- Tower Hamlets

Interpretation of evidence

Last year we explained that, in overall terms, local government in England might just about be on target for 13 of the 14 priority areas six months into a 20-month programme, but in several of these areas there was a long way to go and the evidence was far from conclusive that the target would be reached.

The evidence now is that this was an optimistic assessment. The date for the required outcomes has been reached and the date for the good outcomes soon will be. The evidence that we have presented in this survey confirms that in most priority areas most councils have struggled, even though in some cases good progress has been made from a low base twelve months ago.

In coming to this verdict, we should also point out that:

- The targets also represented a significant change of priority from the previously agreed programme. Making changes midway through a programme is bound to cause problems and delays.

- The programme (rightly) also forces council to make service managers much more accountable for these service improvements than they were before, but it has taken much longer to implement them effectively.

- As our questions in many cases provide only an indicative fit with priority outcome requirements, some of the evidence we have used does not match precisely to the outcome indicator, although we have tended to err on the side of generosity.

- The survey took place between 15 November and 23 December and cannot take account of a late rush of any last minute implementations to meet the required outcomes by 31 December 2005, nor of any planned implementations during the first quarter of 2006 to meet the good outcomes by 31 March 2006.

The new CPA regime in England makes it clear that this policy will continue after the dates of the outcome targets. Many local authorities will have much still to do in order to meet these targets by the end of 2006 at the earliest.

8   Joining up in county areas

8.1   Context

Last year for the first time we introduced an analysis of how websites showed any evidence for regional working. Our rationale was based upon the commonly held view that regional or sub-regional portals might eventually replace individual public sector websites. Such portals would help the public to access services or information about services without needing to understand the complex pattern of service delivery. There is strong evidence that most people do not know which arm of government is responsible for which service. Portals would also strengthen a citizen-centred approach by providing access by the topic that is related to the individual, geography, client grouping or service function.

Since last year there has been a strong political dimension to these arguments. Firm proposals have been made to reduce the number of councils in Northern Ireland from 26 to 7. There have also been informal suggestions about similar moves in local government in Scotland and Wales. However, the real change has taken place in government thinking in England, where everyone now expects a new Local Government Bill by the end of 2006, which will abolish completely or substantially two-tier local government in the shires of England. All this is accompanied by major reductions in the number of police forces and NHS primary care trusts across the UK.

This might make the need for joining up government in the longer term less necessary, as such political restructuring reduces the number of public bodies to join up, even if the changes might take at least three years before they are fully implemented. However, it is worth noting that the bigger the local authority, the more it will need to join up with organisations at the neighbourhood level (eg parish councils) in order to avoid the greater remoteness of large public services. This, too, has some political momentum.

That debate is for the future. In this year's survey, we adopted the same overall approach as last year, reviewing the websites in each sub-region (eg a shire county area), looking for evidence for linking together and the development of regional portals. We did not set out to look at any of the portals in any depth: our interest just extends to identifying how websites take their visitors to related sites. Consequently, we may not have commented upon any linkages back from a portal to the relevant council websites.

This section looks at sub-regional working from the following perspectives:

● Objective analysis of results from survey (see section 8.2)

● Reviewer impressions of joint working (see section 8.3)

● Emergence of county-based portals (see section 8.4)

More detailed information about these topics is found in Appendix 6 and Appendix 7.

8.2 Objective analysis of results from survey

We examined the state of council websites in each sub-region of England, ie each shire county area (ie two-tier councils) and each remaining area (ie single-tier councils), in order to see how each such area is performing as an area. In doing this we have investigated each area in three stages:

- Stage 1   State of each council website

- Stage 2   Evidence of joined-up working in each council website

- Stage 3   Evidence of county and district co-operation

The results for each stage are shown for the top ten counties in each case. The full list of results and an explanation of how the results are calculated are given in Appendix 6.

Stage 1   State of council websites in each county area

We show the state of council websites in terms of three indicators:

- The ratings for each theme (max of 3 for eleven themes, giving 33)

- The number of 'yes' answers to each question (max 60)

- An index created by weighting the two items above against a maximum of 50 each
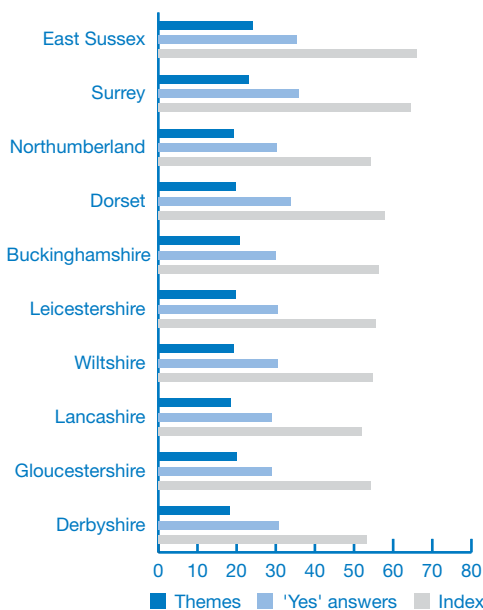
Chart 69 State of websites by county area

Stage 2   Joined-up working in county areas

We assessed more specifically how well joined-up working operates in each area by use of the following three indicators:

- The number of 'yes' answers to each question about 'joined-up' working (max 5) — see section 4.5

- The ratings for theme of 'joined-up' working (max of 3)

- An index created by weighting the two items above against a maximum of 50 each
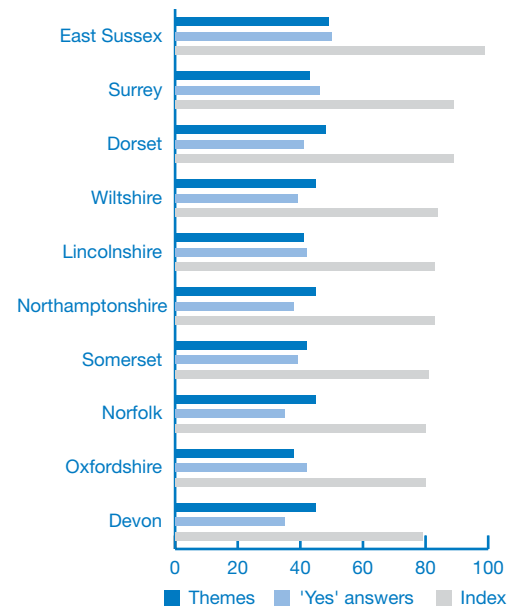
Chart 70 Joined-up working by county area

E-government metadata standard (e-GMS)

Our questions test the linkage of websites relatively superficially in that they can be answered positively without the content being joined-up in the way in which they will be in years to come. In the longer-term the true test will be the way in which the e-Government Metadata Standard (e-GMS) is being used. Version 3 was issued in April 2004.

One of the standard SiteMorse tests sets out to see how well websites comply with e-GMS. This very useful framework lays down the elements, refinements and encoding schemes to be used by government officers when creating metadata for their information resources or designing search interfaces for information systems. The e-GMS is needed to ensure maximum consistency of metadata across public sector organisations.

The test looks for evidence of compliance on the top 250 pages of each website. The chart below shows the percentage of sites that comply with e-GMS in their top 250 pages.

Degree of compliance	2004	2005	2006
100% compliance	1	24	208
0% compliance	385	336	72

Chart 71 Compliance with e-GMS

There has been a major improvement in the last 12 months with nearly nine times more councils complying in full and the numbers failing completely dropping by 80%. This rate of improvement has been more than matched in central government (75% full) compliance, although less than half of central government bodies have been tested.
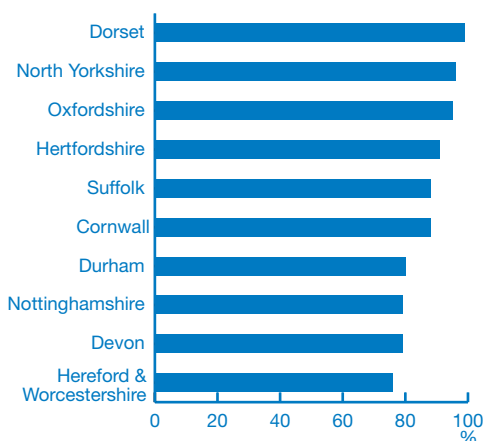
Chart 72 Joined-up working by county area (e-GMS)

Stage 3   County and district co-operation

We assessed very specifically how well counties and districts in each county area provided answers to questions designated for the other tier. The main survey had:

- three questions related to county functions for which we can analyse responses by districts

- two questions related to district functions for which we can analyse responses by counties.

In this analysis we excluded unitaries in shire county areas.
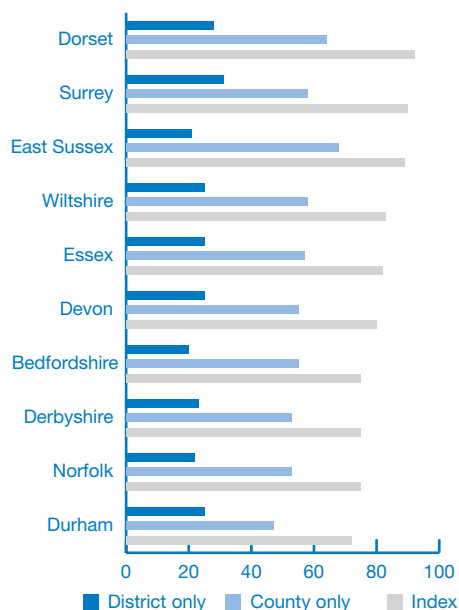
Chart 73 County and district co-operation

It is also interesting to see how well the best county areas compare with other areas of England that have single tier operation. Only two of the four county areas with just unitaries (Berkshire and Cleveland) and only two of the six metropolitan county areas (Greater Manchester and Merseyside) would appear in this list, and then only at the bottom. London would be well below the average. In other words, there is little evidence from this survey that single tier operation delivers better information than two-tier operation in those functions that are now split between counties and districts in shire England.

8.3 Reviewer impressions of joint working

Findings from the three analyses

Many counties appear in similar positions in the three lists based on the results of the main survey (ie excluding the e-GMS test that comes from a different source), supporting the point that joined-up working can only start to become a reality when websites have reached a certain state of development (which we suggest is when all councils in an area have reached what we rank as 'content plus'). Four counties appear in all three top ten lists — East Sussex, Surrey, Dorset and Wiltshire in that order of assessment (eg East Sussex are top in two of the three lists). The county area that has improved the most from a similar analysis is East Sussex, which barely appeared in the equivalent lists last year.

If we add to these findings the results from the e-GMS test, then only Dorset appears in all lists. This is no surprise because Dorset is the one area in England that has moved away from the concept of one website per council. The site launched in 2005 called www.dorsetforyou.com replaces the old county site and four of the six districts. As we have in this survey assessed information and services from a viewpoint of a citizen in each of those four districts, by having to look at the same new site, then the results are similar if not the same!

This objective analysis of the results is supported by a more impressionistic account from reviewers. Each reviewer was allocated whole areas to cover (eg all councils in one county or metropolitan area) so that each could build up a good impression of how well joined-up each area felt.

The detailed results are shown in Appendix 6.

There are many issues highlighted by this exercise. There is much evidence of efforts that have gone into joint working between counties and districts, typically in sharing A to Z lists of services, but much is as yet incomplete. Examples where joint working is quickly apparent are still relatively few. According to reviewers these examples would include at least East Sussex, Lincolnshire and Surrey.

Reviewers have also been able to spot opportunities for more sharing. One example is the use of GIS which is expensive and maybe not easy to implement. Above all, there is much common data based on the common geography. Counties like Northamptonshire that have a very good GIS facility should be able to share their expertise with the districts which almost certainly will not have that expertise.

Too often, there appears to be unwilling partners, sometimes the county, sometimes a small number of districts. Maybe each council has different priorities, and each will eventually close up the gaps, but in the meantime the public is left stranded.

One group of councils that do appear to ignore any county/district joint working are unitaries. There are several examples where the unitary in a county does not feature at all in, say, a shared A to Z list of services. Unitary councils might say that they do not serve the same individuals as counties and districts do in two-tier areas and hence the need for joined-up working is not as strong.

8.4　Emergence of county-based portals

On the other hand, where a unitary exists, it is usually located in the middle of the county area (the 'doughnut' structure) or is at least a hub of a broader community and so it seems perverse not to belong to the county-based partnership which may represent a large part of that broader community. It is as if, having come together in the 1990s reorganisation of local government, they believe that it has stopped there and there is no need to go any further, or perhaps they also want to assert their independence. What about people who work in the unitary area and live outside? Might they not be confused about local government boundaries, responsibilities and services?

Nowhere is this more apparent than in those four areas that used to have two-tier working, but no longer do — Avon, Berkshire, Cleveland and Humberside. In none of these did our reviewers find much evidence of any activity that hinted at joint working.

As last year, we have used our area-based allocation of sites to reviewers as a way of identifying portals used by councils. Last year, we found a large number of all types of portal, but were not able to analyse their value because we found so many. This year we have focused on what we have called county-based portals that aim to bring together information and services within an area. In other words, they have been set up to play deliberately a role in improving shared services and build on existing joint working.

We identified the following list of such portals which are analysed in more detail in Appendix 7:

County-based portals

Cornwall	www.cornishkey.com
Cumbria	www.connectedcumbria.info
Devon	www.devonline.gov.uk
Dorset	www.dorsetforyou.com
Essex	www.essexonline.gov.uk
Gloucestershire	www.councildirect.info
Greater Manchester	Several portals
(Herefordshire &) Worcestershire	www.whub.org.uk
Kent	www.kentconnects.com
Lincolnshire	www.lincup.net
London	www.yourlondon.gov.uk
Northamptonshire	www.connect2northamptonshire.com
Northumberland	www.northumberlandonline.gov.uk
Nottinghamshire	www.notts.info
Oxfordshire	www.oxfordshiregateway.co.uk
Suffolk	www.onesuffolk.co.uk
Surrey	Several portals

Last year we reported that the use of portals is at a very immature stage with relatively few examples of good practice that can be recommended. The picture is similar this year with one or two exceptions.

One symptom of this immaturity is that councils often do not link with them in a very clear and positive way. Our more detailed analysis of these portals suggests the need for councils to be much better at linking up with them. For example, the link needs to be prominent and visible and the reason for the link needs to be clearly stated. Too often this is missing. Links in both directions need to be made wherever appropriate so that they add value to the customer journey and do not leave the visitor guessing about the next step or the next step but one.

Another weakness of many is that the mechanisms for finding information such as the A to Z list or the search engine must work. This is, of course, also true for any council site, but, as the added value of these portals is often the sharing of common information, it really is critical to the purpose of the portal that it is easy to find the right information quickly. Some of our experiences show the problems that can occur and devalue the concept of the portal.

The examples from Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire are ones that seem to avoid most of these problems.

One very prominent portal seen for the first time in 2005 has been the new London portal. Whilst still much under development, this promises to add real value to information and services about the capital.

Finally, two examples in this list are planned to be more than portals, but to replace the council sites, those in Dorset and Worcestershire. The former in particular has received some publicity as offering a different approach to the provision of web-based information about local public services. It is too early to judge either example, partly because neither yet covers the whole county. The likely re-organisation of local government in county areas of England may well give greater impetus to such ventures, and may even influence the shape of any re-structuring.

Key messages

● **Make sure that your site links to all neighbouring councils.**

● **Look for ways of sharing common information and services by use of devices such as A to Z list of services and search engines.**

● **Make sure that any such facilities really do work.**

● **If your council has an interest in broader portals, make sure that the council website links properly in both directions and not just at the home page.**

● **In such cases, make sure that a brief explanation or introduction to the portal is offered.**

Further information: **See Appendix 6 for detailed analysis of joined-up working See Appendix 7 for analysis of county-based portals**

Part G
The future

We consider the impact of the transformation agenda on the pivotal role of the website and the need to integrate it in all aspects of service delivery. The national campaign on take-up planned for 2006 will also present some more pressing issues about both promotion and usability.

9 The future

9.1 Views of the review team

Starting with our last annual survey (*Better connected 2005*) and continuing with our special report (*Better connected: aiming high*), we have in the past twelve months reinforced the need for councils to raise their game in developing their websites. The 2005 targets, and latterly for those in England, priority service outcomes may have been the targets to achieve. However, as they have become closer, sights have again been raised to achieve higher, and indeed more worthwhile, targets of satisfying the needs of users.

In the past two years we have related stories from two shire districts about what the task of improvement feels like to their web managers in engaging with the rest of the council. Both accounts captured the hard work involved, the different approaches that may be required and the need to be responsive to local issues. This year we have invited the reviewers from the *Better connected* team to give, without any specific brief, their overall impressions of what their experiences when using council websites felt like to them. They have produced a wide range of comments that highlight well the areas for improvement.

This journey seems to be a bumpy ride! There are a number of different topics that stand out in reviewers' minds, yet some, too, are repeated. If there is a common theme, it seems that there may have been more functions added in terms of transactions, but too often this has happened at the expense of usability.

Reviewer 1 on joining up in two-tier areas

Counties have much improved their websites and they seem to have now recognised that this is important to them too. There are, however, still problems with joining up in two-tier areas with several initiatives with partial involvement across councils in one area. These are confusing and there is often duplication, but the efforts are good. More thought needs to be given to searches across several councils as these generate far too many results if one cannot narrow them down to, for example, a single council.

Reviewer 3 on 'look and feel'

There are many very boring websites that lack images, good design and good ideas. Making a website interesting and adding value is essential otherwise users will not return to the site. Some non-transactional sites were definitely compelling, because information was well presented, images were used effectively and there were imaginative features on the site. A good example of this is Aberdeenshire's home page, which uses good design combined with seasonal news, useful links and interesting topics including haddock recipes!

Reviewer 2 also on joining up

Where there are other local sites such as business, or tourism, and in many cases portals, integration of these sites is not well achieved and either information is duplicated or the information on the external site is not suitably described and signposted.

Only a minority of sites make good use of external sites such as Directgov, DWP, NHSDirect. Districts mostly link to counties for schools and libraries but much less often for road information, social services and planning. Counties very seldom link successfully to all their districts for all the main subjects such as council tax, benefits and refuse.

It seems to me that many sites do not have a clear strategy as to what the site should include, and apart from its own services, providing information about other public services is patchy.

I found no examples of councils looking across county boundaries to provide information. Few councils, too, seem to understand the locality perspective of residents. In a geographically spread area, citizens take interest in the nearby town and surrounding villages, not the district as a whole. Few councils seem to understand this, although you would have thought elected members would!

Reviewer 4 also on 'look and feel'

Council websites are becoming quite boring. The more compelling websites use graphics (design elements as well as images of objects or people) to make a website engaging to use, and add user interest. We must encourage councils to become more creative with their website content, encouraging citizen take-up includes making websites easy to use and memorable, and the best ones include content that extends the scope beyond basic delivery of services. Boring website designs won't achieve that easily.

Reviewer 5 on searching

I think that the search facility on many sites is still poor. Search results are not properly labelled so I cannot see what I am clicking on. It is too common for the search to be dominated either by 'pdfs', minutes from council meetings or press releases. The search often brings up multiple results for the same page. Search results often feel scrappy and messy. Many sites use Google. I think we should give advice on best practice with Google as the way some sites implement it, is detrimental to the site. I lose the site navigation and am confused when the search brings up external sites.

Reviewer 6 on convergence

I was a little disappointed overall with the progress of the sites, although I wondered whether it was the particular areas I had been given that weren't very strong.

I felt that there were more transactions and that councils are being more systematic in their approach to implementing transactions. For example, many sites are now using dedicated forms software to create a range of online forms and presumably to handle the data received in a more sophisticated manner. Many of these sites were, however, under-developed in other ways such as quality of content.

Content management systems have, I feel, become the norm and the result is a convergence in the structure and layout and even the look of sites. It was also noticeable that similar headings were used to categorise content (eg 'Transport and Streets', Health and Social Care', 'Community and Living'.

Reviewer 7 on usability

The functionality of websites seems to have increased, but not necessarily the usability. I think one of the reasons is that the functionality has been largely supplied by 'bolt-ons' from third-party suppliers and the navigation, together with the consistent look and feel of the website, is often compromised.

Reviewer 8 also on usability

I was surprised at the standard of some of the websites considering the years that providing information electronically to customers has been around. However, I did find that a good number of websites did include some useful transactional features; online payments and library catalogues are becoming much more common.

Sometimes the website's navigation and content let the site down. These are essential foundations and when these websites had good transactional features it was a real shame. These areas are fundamental in putting transactions into context and providing an informed customer experience.

On occasion I was surprised that I found some of the websites still hard to use, it was very frustrating when I couldn't find the information and it felt like wading through mud. I could definitely tell the websites that have been well thought out as it was enjoyable doing the survey on these. They evoked very different feelings. This shows that customers all over the country are having very varied experiences with local government websites, and this is likely to affect the take-up of this service.

Reviewer 9 also on usability again

Overall, councils continue to make steady progress towards more transactional websites, but it feels like slow progress considering the number of years and the amount of funding councils have now had to get their web services right. Perhaps it is still an issue of priority, that many councillors still do not realise how important this work is, and that significant funds need to be allocated to it.

There is noticeably more location-based information this year, both linked to postcode and to GIS mapping. However many GIS services are not intuitive to use, and have insufficient guidance. They also open up a whole new can of accessibility worms, at a time when web accessibility for ordinary web pages is still a problem (albeit against a background of growing awareness in this area).

My one message to councils this year would be: in improving your sites and adding more transactions, never lose sight of the basics: usability, usability, usability!

9.2 A more objective assessment

Whilst we should listen carefully to what our reviewers say, because they share an unparalleled knowledge of local authority websites, we should also consider more objectively the pieces of evidence from our survey:

Overview of progress

- The number of **transactional sites** has increased from 38 in 2005 to 60 in 2006, the largest increase yet recorded. The rate of increase has quickened in the past twelve months, but many might have expected to see a much bigger increase in England at least. Below this level there has been less change than in the previous three years.

- Below the transactional ranking, there has been **much less change** than the steady 30% improvement in rankings recorded in the past three years. Promotional sites have almost disappeared, but the number of content sites has dropped by only 11, with many slipping back from content plus.

- Similarly, the **rate of improvement** has slowed down in other ways. In particular, we recorded an 18% increase in 'Yes' answers to a sample of 14 questions repeated from last year (compared with 37% last year from the previous year).

Useful content

- We have tested websites in terms of **information content** about the new Licensing Act, information about schools and information about jobs. Generally, most councils have handled these scenarios well.

- One of the most difficult results to summarise concerns **currency** of information. 44% of sites were rated as at least satisfactory, if not very good, compared with 63% last year.

- Out tests on use of **external links** proved more positive with 69% rated satisfactory or very good, and a small improvement over last year.

- The provision of **news value** on the home page saw a 30% improvement from last year with now 88% of all transactional or content plus sites rated as very good.

- We tested for a large sample of **transactions** and found a somewhat mixed set of results. Some transactions (eg reserving or renewing library books) are very well developed but others that ought to be (eg helping suppliers) are not.

- The **response to our sample e-mail** improved from last year's test (60% from 47%). We rated 80% of those replies as satisfactory or very good.

- The verdict on **participation** in council websites is that there is some evidence of improvement, although the special survey on discussion forms shows that this method of participation is very much a minority pastime.

Usability

- The very recent introduction of **local authority services into Directgov** is a sensible improvement in helping to make council transactions easier to find.

- The state of **A to Z lists of services** has improved over last year's disappointing results with 70% now rated as satisfactory or very good.

- The state of **search engine facilities** first tested two years ago has improved considerably, although many sites still have much to do. Yet, only 10% of councils found four of the most common terms that any council website should be able to handle. If we combine the results of the two tests, just four councils passed both with flying colours.

- Use of **locational information** is getting stronger, but only three in 10 sites are rated as very good or satisfactory. Some 'Find the nearest' facilities are excellent, as also are some GIS facilities, but they are still the exception rather than the rule.

- Using the same questions, the overall assessments on **navigation** around the website have dropped a little from last year.

- The **accessibility** of websites has not improved at all when judged against Level A conformance with the WAI guidelines. Although we can now show that this is the best performing part of the public sector across the EU, far too many sites are still inaccessible, and therefore not as usable for everyone, as they certainly should be.

- Not at all easy to test, though very important to achieve, the **use of plain English** has seen a modest improvement from a sample of 73 sites.

- The **technical performance** (eg number of technical errors) has seen a marked improvement across the country.

- A new test we introduced on **security** for 20 sites indicates some cause for concern about insecure websites.

Usage

- **Access to the internet** at home is gradually increasing.

- **Usage of local authority websites** has also increased by an estimated 40% increase in visitor numbers according to a sample of 19 sites over the period from December 2004 to December 2005.

- **Visitor satisfaction** is going up as well. In 83% of cases visitors find the information they are looking for, or at least part of it. In comparison with last year's figures, this amounts to an overall improvement of 5% over a high level. 84% said that they would return to the council website compared with 81% last year.

- Finally, we have more advice and evidence to hand about what makes for **successful promotion**, and it need not cost a great deal.

Priority outcomes

- For councils in England, the game has been focused on striving for the bar set by the priority outcomes. In most priority areas the majority of councils have struggled, even though in some cases good progress has been made from a low level reached twelve months ago.

In conclusion...

These are an uneven set of results that reinforce the notion of a bumpy ride. Whilst striving high, many will fall short. The results are also a reminder that managing a council website is a complex business, because there are many pressures to balance and many criteria to achieve that require a corporate effort, not just a task for the web team.

This summary of findings may be quite daunting for those who are only too well aware of their site's current deficiencies. What should be the priorities? We can help by identifying from this list those that may require serious attention. Before we do we should consider in greater detail the likely impact of two external factors.

9.3 Impact of the transformation agenda

Last year it was the efficiency review that should have driven plans for future development of the local authority website; in particular the need to develop the website so that it could support the move of local government activity to self-service. This is still a very important policy to adopt and one which many local authorities have still to implement as a serious objective.

Since last year, the transformation agenda, as captured in the strategic statement from the e-Government Unit entitled *Transformational government — enabled by technology* (November 2005), has strengthened the policies in the efficiency review and added some broader perspectives. For example, it stresses the need to design services around citizens and businesses in a way that the efficiency review did not. The directions that this document has set are broad, strategic and certainly not all specific to local public services. They do, however, reinforce the role of the local authority website as pivotal to delivery of customer-centred services.

Service transformation in a local authority context may take different forms, but the evidence from other analysis carried out by Socitm *Insight* (*Modern public services: transformation in practice*, January 2006) confirms that use of the internet is central to around 80% of the examples collected to date.

The website should, therefore, be positioned as a vehicle that will help to drive such transformation forward. The engine of that vehicle must be up to the job. The infrastructure of the website should be robust to cope with the change. The findings of the annual survey this time can be used as a self-audit tool to diagnose the current state of the vehicle.

9.4 Impact of the take-up campaign

The second external factor is more immediate. Last year we advised on the importance of focusing on the take-up of websites. This year there is a major national campaign to raise awareness everywhere and encourage people in targeted areas to go online for some specific transactions deemed to be popular and suitable for such a campaign.

Time will tell how successful that campaign will be, but we have already reported in this document a 40% increase in unique visitors over the past 12 months (December 2004 to December 2005) and a small increase in visitor satisfaction on top of already high levels over the same period (3% to 5% depending on which particular indicator one uses). There is every chance that these trends will continue. Does this make the campaign unnecessary? Far from it, because the potential scope for improvement across the country is far greater than current levels of usage and satisfaction.

The national campaign, however, does provide a focus for take-up in more than one way. Firstly, it should encourage web managers to ensure that at least the specific transactions will work from the chosen route via Directgov and then at all steps in the transaction itself. Both the campaign and the council website will suffer from major dints in reputation if the advertised service does not work, or even takes the visitor to a 'dead end' such as a telephone line. Secondly, it should encourage councils, or groups of councils, to mount local campaigns and promotions. This should in turn encourage the sharing of good practice, such as the example described in this report about online school admissions in Hertfordshire.

9.5 Measurement of online services

Now more than ever, councils should be gathering and using critical information about visitor usage, satisfaction and behaviour so that resources can be targeted most efficiently at the outcomes with the highest return (eg highest levels of take-up).

The information about changes in market share of visits from Hitwise helps to identify those who are making the most inroads. The information about satisfaction from our website take-up service (using Nielsen// NetRatings) helps to identify patterns of visitor interest and feedback. The information showing visitor behaviour, which we have repeated from last year using click maps (from speed-trap), helps to identify patterns of access into websites. Added together all this information helps to inform decisions, even if only learned second-hand from our reports, although there is no substitute for using first-hand information about one's own website.

We are moving into a phase where councils cannot afford to function without a proper performance measurement system in place for use of the website, which includes the elements listed above, but provides answers to other questions. For example, if there has been a 40% increase in visitors in the year, which we believe there has, what has led to that increase? Which services? Which groups of people? Which new features? Knowing the answers to such questions enables successes to be repeated and failures to be avoided.

The link between the website and other channels is important to understand as well. How often do employees use the website to support advice given to the public? How much do contact centres depend on the website? Can one find out the impact of any employee training, or awareness-raising sessions on visitor traffic? These are all legitimate uses of the website, but are often ignored.

9.6 Encouragement of participation

The last three to five years have seen a major drive to put services online on council websites which has obviously been reflecting government policy and funding. It has led to the neglect of one strong potential role of the website to develop a dialogue between citizens and their council. An important report from the Audit Commission/IDeA entitled *Fitness for purpose in the 21st century: Strategic choice at local level in the new millennium* (July 2005) offers a strong reminder that councils have strategic choices to make. Their prime purpose may not just be service improvement, but might be community leadership or democratic renewal. The e-government programme was not originally intended just to focus on service improvement, but in practice has very much done this.

The website is an ideal communications channel that can encourage participation and two-way dialogue in support of community leadership and democratic renewal objectives. We have seen from this year's survey that just 50 councils have evidence of a discussion forum on their websites, but only 16 of these are really active. Even when used to support service improvement initiatives, we have seen only isolated examples of SMS text messaging being used to engage with people on specific services such as alerting people to job applications, or planning decisions. In short, the website has not started to realise its potential in local government. Now is the time to review this potential.

9.7 Importance of usability

One thread running through this year's survey is that content and functions have been added to council websites often at the expense of usability. The review team certainly shared this observation and used different examples to illustrate it such as content management systems implemented in haste, or third party applications added without any integration. A to Z lists are much improved. Search engines have improved but there is much still to do before they are uniformly consistent across local government. Accessibility has certainly not improved at all, and we often forget that the benefits of accessible websites lead to improved ease of use for everyone, not just those with sight problems.

The advice currently being commissioned by the ODPM in England to help web managers make their sites more usable is very timely. The four CD-ROMs that are planned for 2006 (one already published) have the advantage of being tested for usability in their development. This means that councils using them can benefit from the investment in usability testing made by the Government that individually they can ill afford.

9.8 Integration of the website in council business

Perhaps the most important message for the next twelve months is to ensure that the website is made an integral part of service delivery. Every service manager in every council should own the website as part of the mechanism for delivering services ranging from rubbish collection to education, planning to social work, and street care to the library service.

There is plenty of evidence from both this survey, and more anecdotally, that this message is at best only fully understand by the minority of service managers in most councils. If transformation of local public services is to happen, acting on this message is a critical step in that journey. Service managers must indeed become better connected.

One critical test of this step is the need to market and promote the website as a main channel for delivering services. Councils and their web managers should recognise that much of the marketing effort needs to be spent internally with colleagues, who may oppose promotion of website take-up for a number of different reasons. They may worry about people not having internet access. In many cases this concern can be overcome via intermediaries such as contact centre staff, professionals, and the voluntary sector, helping, for example, the individual requiring a service such as child care. Research into people's ability to access the internet (as opposed to their 'being online') indicates that many more people are using the internet, via friends, family and public access points than is generally recognised.

Alternatively, service managers may not understand the potential benefits for customer service and efficiency. This requires leadership and education from more senior levels of the organisation. Many councils appear not to have investigated very closely the efficiency gains that can be legitimately obtained from moving activity to self-service on the website.

Yet, promoting the website is often a simple matter that need cost little if service managers own the issue. We have already shown how Hertfordshire CC gained a major increase in take-up of its online school admissions facility by some simple tasks such as asking some parents and redesigning their booklet to convey the message that making the application was best done online rather than filling in a complex form. Another such simple example is to remind callers to a contact centre waiting in a queue that callers may be able to find information from the council website. It is then very useful to have the measurement system in place to analyse how often this diversion is used.

One barrier to mainstreaming the contribution of the website is that managing and developing websites can often seem to be a technical subject, because of the jargon that web managers use. Accessibility and meeting WAI guidelines can appear very dry and technical. The reality is that, if sites are not accessible, a significant minority is excluded from using online services, even though the technology potentially can liberate the disabled from their physical difficulties. This should be right at the heart of a local authority's policy on social inclusion. Moreover, pragmatically there is a business opportunity being lost in that council services may not be taken up and resultant efficiency gains may also be lost. The key point is for web managers to communicate the technical issue in language that service managers and, in this case, policy-makers really understand.

One final thought — Re-organisation in England

At the date of publication it looks very likely that yet another reorganisation of local government is on the cards, in this case in parts of England where two-tier local government is in operation. It is difficult to predict exactly what might happen and the outcome will differ from area to area.

Since the last major re-organisation in the mid- to late-1990s, the website has emerged as a major corporate asset. For the first time, then, this might just have an impact on the choices made and certainly on the costs of transition. Wherever one stands in this process, it would seem very sensible to keep a close eye on this and position the website to help in the restructuring. This might give additional impetus to existing partnerships or may require new partnerships. In a truly connected world, the case for major restructuring would of course be much weakened!

10 Conclusions

10.1 Websites in 2006

We have finished with 2005 and its association with government targets. It is a moot point just how effective the target for 100% availability of online services has been and in England there are mixed views about the value of the priority outcomes policy. There have been some successes (eg online schools admissions) and some failures (eg engagement with business).

It is almost inevitable that with an activity as complex as managing a successful council website, and a sector as diverse as local government in the UK, any summary will result in some good and some bad points which can all too easily cancel each other out and lead to a bland conclusion. We hope that we have avoided that by focusing on both the highlights and the lowlights. We have, for example, seen a sharper rise in the number of transactional sites from 38 to 60 than in earlier years, but many would say that is not fast enough. Certainly below that level the improvement in the past year has not been spectacular, to say the least. Yet we have seen local government respond well to the demands of the new Licensing Act and most councils are learning that putting job vacancies and applications online is an important service that people use and value.

Some aspects of usability have seen promising steps forward, such as the state of A to Z lists. Some steps are more faltering, as in the use of search engines, and some steps backwards have been taken, as in the disappointing accessibility assessments. Perhaps the rush to add transactions, which seem in many sites to have compromised usability, will now peter out and allow web teams to focus on usability.

One aspect of the survey that does show stronger positive evidence of progress concerns take-up of websites. A 40% increase in visitors in a year is good progress, whatever the base 12 months ago, and is not as gloomy a message as other parts of the public sector have portrayed. High levels of visitor satisfaction are also very welcome at the end of 2005. This is a good platform to build on for the next year.

10.2 The future

We should now focus much more on the transformation agenda. This requires a much stronger commitment from most local authorities in the way in which they manage the self-service channel than they have shown hitherto. New ways of working depend on a website that is focused on customer needs and robust enough to manage the workload.

We have made a strong case for integrating the role of the website into every part of local public services. In particular, service managers need to be fully engaged to the extent that they manage the marketing and promotion of the website rather than expecting the web manager, or even the marketing or public relations professional, to do it on their behalf. The days of seeing the website as a toy for the technical people are surely over.

A more pressing concern is the need to make the best of the opportunity, one suspects never to be repeated, of a major national campaign to promote online local government services. Hopefully, that will help everyone to see more visitors to their websites, and perhaps more importantly, to learn from each other as to how to increase take-up further.

Key messages for improvement

- Learn from this year's survey the priorities for developing your website so that it can match the expectations of the organisation to transform its services.

- Gather and analyse all the evidence possible about usage and potential usage of your website.

- Look at ways of using the website as a way of developing a two-way dialogue with local people.

- Focus on making your website as usable as possible.

- Look to integrate the website into the mainstream of all local services.

- Learn from each other's good practices.

Changes to the *Better connected* process

Context

Last year we signalled our intention of updating our ranking and assessment process in line with changing requirements. We published our final intentions in a special briefing in September 2005 and implemented one part of a two-part process with our publication *Better connected: aiming high* (December 2005). That first part covered changes to the assessment criteria. The second part covers changes to the ranking system and will start to be implemented in next year's report *Better connected 2007*.

Changes to assessment criteria

We are firmly sticking to the framework of 'useful, usable and used' that we published in *Better connected: building for the future* (January 2004). We have, however, reviewed the detailed criteria and made a number of adjustments to it, which are summarised in a separate document (Version 2 of the assessment framework). This makes no reference to how we might use the assessment results and is, therefore, neutral in that regard.

This is, then, what you might call a straightforward review of the detail. Whilst we recommend that webmasters take a look at it in preparing their plans for improvement, the changes are not major if they have already been applying the principles and the detail in Version 1 of the framework.

Changes to ranking system

The main proposal centred on introducing a new ranking for sites that are assessed as being '**excellent** — effective, efficient and engaging (E sites)', set higher than the current transactional status. This will re-position the survey to deal post-2005 with the practicalities of assessing sites that are now so much more sophisticated than they were in 1999 when we devised the ranking system.

The current ranking system (P, C, C+ and T) will be used for the last time in that format in this 2006 report. We will expect that the P ranking ('promotional' sites) will drop out by default as all sites will develop beyond that stage during 2006. We will phase out the C and C+ rankings ('content' and 'content plus' sites), although at what pace is not decided. We will not formally introduce the E ranking until 2007, although this 2006 report has started to move in that direction. Our approach here is still evolutionary rather than revolutionary and we plan to phase in the new system over the next two years. This explains why we have not applied these changes in this report for 2006.

The benefits of the new ranking system are that web managers and others will be able to see quite clearly the strong and weak points of their sites, and everyone else's, and will have more information to support the way in which websites are improving (or not). The new approach will have several advantages, including:

- making the assessment process more transparent

- giving current transactional sites clear targets for improvement

- encouraging sites to aim for excellence.

In short, we will be helping councils to sustain their efficiency drive to self-service operations, by encouraging a virtuous circle of increasing take-up by improving the product by increasing take-up.

Further information

Useful publications

- *Accessible Web Design — A Practical and Strategic Guide* published by the EFD (www.efd.org.uk)

- *Content and Complexity: The Role of Content in Information Design* by Erlbaum

- *Designing Web Usability: The Practice of Simplicity* by Jakob Nielsen (www.useit.com)

- *29 Guidelines for Search Usability* by Jakob Nielsen (www.nngroup.com/reports/ecommerce/search.html)

- *Don't Make Me Think: Common Sense Approach to Web Usability* by Steve Krug (www.sensible.com)

Websites with useful information and advice

- www.htmlhelp.com for advice about good practice from the Web Design Group, an organisation that promotes good web design — including non-browser specific, non-resolution specific design that is accessible to all.

- www.plainenglish.co.uk for Plain English tips for clear websites.

- www.writing-skills.com for free tips on writing clear web content.

- www.w3.org/wai for advice about the Web Accessibility Initiative from the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), the body at the forefront of the development of standards in good design.

- www.rnib.org.uk/webaccesscentre for advice about accessibility from the RNIB.

- www.drc.org.uk for advice about the Disability Discrimination Act 2005.

Important policy documents

- *Fitness for purpose in the 21st century: Strategic choice at local level in the new millennium* (Audit Commission/IDeA, July 2005)

- *Transformational government — enabled by technology* (Cabinet Office, November 2005)

Other reports referenced in this and earlier publications

- *Dimensions of Usability* by W Quesenbery (Albers, M and Mazur, B, eds 2002)

- *Guidelines for UK websites* (Office of the e-Envoy)

- *Illustrated handbook for web management teams* (Office of the e-Envoy)

- *Understanding the Audience* (by MORI for the Common Information Environment (CIE) Group) www.common-info.org.uk/audienceresearch.shtml

- *Publicly-Available Specification* (PAS 78) — *Guide to Good Practice in Commissioning Accessible Websites* (March 2006)

- *Good practice guidance for online transactions for local authority web managers* (ODPM)

Socitm *Insight* reports referenced in this publication

- *Better connected 2004* (February 2004)

- *Better connected 2005* (February 2005)

- *Better connected: advice to citizens* (October 2003)

- *Better connected: building for the future* (January 2004)

- *Survey of local authority websites from a business perspective, 2004* (ODPM, October 2004, commissioned from Socitm *Insight*)

- *Better connected: aiming high* (December 2005)

- *eAccessibility of public sector services in the European Union* (Cabinet Office, November 2005, commissioned from Socitm *Insight*)

- *eAccessibility of '.gov.uk' services* (Cabinet Office, March 2006, commissioned from Socitm *Insight*)

- *Building usage of council websites* — Issue 1 (December 2004)

- *Building usage of council websites* — Issue 2 (August 2005)

Appendices

1 Summary of results for each organisation

Local authorities

Sequence of entries

Entries are listed in alphabetical order within the following types:

- Shire counties

- Shire districts

- London boroughs

- Metropolitan districts

- English unitaries

- Welsh unitaries

- Scottish unitaries

- Northern Ireland districts

The subscriber-only area of www.socitm.gov.uk contains an index of all councils in alphabetical order, together with the website address for each local authority.

Contents of local authority entries

- Name of organisation

- Site classification in 2006 (see definition in Section 3.1)   P C C+ T or U

- Improvement from 2005 (tick)

- Scenario 1 Resident enquiring about new licensing regulations   (0, 1, 2, 3)   Note 1

- Scenario 2 Family on the move and enquiring about schools information   (0, 1, 2, 3)   Note 1

- Scenario 3 Working parent looking for new job   (0, 1, 2, 3)   Note 1

- Currency   (0, 1, 2, 3)   Note 1

- Links elsewhere   (0, 1, 2, 3)   Note 1

- News value   (0, 1, 2, 3)   Note 2

- E-mail response (days)   (Up to 20)
  Key 'N' = no reply received, 'X' = no e-mail address/online contact form

- Transactions (questions)   (count, maximum 16)   Note 3

- Participation   (count, maximum 4)   Note 4

- Use of search   (0, 1, 2, 3)   Note 1

- Use of A to Z   (0, 1, 2, 3)   Note 1

- Use of location   (0, 1, 2, 3)   Note 1

- Navigation   (0, 1, 2, 3)   Note 1

- Accessibility (Level A)   (✓✓, ✓, (✓) or blank)   Note 5

- Readability (Flesch Reading Ease score)   Note 6

- Resilience (errors)   (A to E)   Note 7

- Resilience (availability)   (A to E)   Note 8

- Resilience (home page)   (A to E)   Note 9

- Scenarios and themes   (count, maximum 33)   Note 10

- Answers to 'Yes' questions   (count, maximum 60)

Notes

1   How well does the website deal with this scenario/theme?
    0 is no information 1 is inadequate 2 is satisfactory 3 is very good

2   Only those sites that have been rated C+ or T status have been assessed for news value.

3   The number of Yes answers to questions listed in Section 4.7

4   The number of Yes answers to questions listed in Section 4.9

5   ✓✓ denotes Level AA conformance
    ✓   denotes Level A conformance
    (✓) refers to three districts in Dorset, whose websites have now been integrated into
         www.dorsetforyou.com that itself has been assessed as reaching Level A.

6   Only those sites that are T status, or very well developed as C+ have been assessed for readability,
    using the Flesch Reading Ease score (see Section 5.8)

7   The technical errors detected by SiteMorse are banded as follows:
    Band A: 0 errors
    Band B: 1 to 10 errors
    Band C: 11 to 100 errors
    Band D: 101 to 1000 errors
    Band E: Over 1000 errors

8   The service availability failures detected by SiteMorse are banded as follows:

Band A	0 failures	Band B	1 failure
Band C	2 failures	Band D	3 failures
Band E	4 or 5 failures	Band F	6 to 10 failures
Band G	11 to 50 failures	Band H	Over 50 failures
Band I	Not available for testing		

    The maximum failures are 240 (hourly intervals between 11 January and 21 January 2006)

9   The home page performance tests detected by SiteMorse are banded as follows:
    Band A: All 5 tests passed
    Band B: 4 tests passed
    Band C: 3 tests passed
    Band D: 2 tests passed
    Band E: 1 test passed
    Band F: 0 tests passed

10 This is the total of all assessments (0, 1, 2, 3) for eleven individual scenarios and themes
    (excluding news value which did not have a complete survey). Only ten scenarios and themes are
    shown in the table.

Shire counties

Organisation	Site classifiaction 2006	Improvement from 2005	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3	Currency	Links elsewhere	News value	E-mail response (days)	Services	Participation	Use of search	A to Z	Location	Navigation	Accessibility	Readability	Resilience (errors)	Resilience (availability)	Resilience (home page)	Scenarios and themes	'Yes' to questions
Bedfordshire CC	C		0	1	1	1	2		1	4	1	1	2	0	2			D	B	E	13	19
Buckinghamshire CC	C+		0	3	3	2	3	3	1	8	1	2	3	2	2			C	C	D	25	35
Cambridgeshire CC	C+	✓	0	3	2	0	2	2	N	5	1	1	1	1	2			C	D	E	16	26
Cheshire CC	C+		0	2	2	2	1	3	1	5	2	1	2	0	0			C	H	E	13	28
Cornwall CC	C+		0	2	2	2	2	3	1	4	3	2	1	1	3	✓		C	B	E	18	30
Cumbria CC	C		0	1	2	2	2		1	6	3	2	1	1	1			D	G	F	16	20
Derbyshire CC	T	✓	0	2	2	2	2	3	1	10	3	2	2	2	2		12.0	B	C	B	20	41
Devon CC	T		0	3	3	2	2	3	13	12	4	3	2	1	3		29.3	C	D	F	25	47
Dorset CC	C+		0	2	2	2	3	3	2	10	2	3	2	1	3	✓		A	B	C	23	39
Durham CC	T		0	3	2	3	3	1	7	8	2	2	3	3	2		46.6	D	B	E	27	39
East Sussex CC	T		0	2	2	3	3	3	1	8	3	3	3	3	3	✓	11.8	B	C	D	27	39
Essex CC	C+		0	2	3	1	1	3	1	5	2	1	1	1	1			B	C	D	14	22
Gloucestershire CC	C+		0	2	3	2	2	3	1	6	2	2	1	1	2		58.9	B	E	D	20	29
Hampshire CC	C+		0	2	3	1	1	1	1	7	2	2	2	2	1			C	C	C	18	29
Hertfordshire CC	T		0	3	3	2	2	3	1	7	1	2	2	2	3		44.1	B	E	A	25	28
Kent CC	C+		0	2	2	2	2	3	1	7	3	2	1	2	1			B	C	E	19	28
Lancashire CC	C+		0	2	2	1	2	2	1	6	2	2	2	2	2			C	E	C	19	35
Leicestershire CC	C+		0	2	2	3	3	3	2	9	3	3	2	3	3			B	G	E	26	42
Lincolnshire CC	T	✓	0	2	3	2	3	3	1	10	1	2	3	1	3		11.0	B	H	E	24	38
Norfolk CC	C+		0	2	2	2	2	1	2	9	2	1	2	1	1			C	D	E	17	29
North Yorkshire CC	C		0	3	2	2	2		N	9	2	1	1	0	1			C	E	D	15	32
Northamptonshire CC	C+		0	1	2	2	2	3	1	9	2	3	2	3	2		50.0	C	C	F	22	37
Northumberland CC	C		0	2	3	0	1		2	3	0	1	2	1	1			E	G	E	14	17
Nottinghamshire CC	C+		0	1	1	2	2	3	1	8	2	1	0	1	2			B	F	F	13	29
Oxfordshire CC	C+		0	2	2	3	2	3	N	6	2	1	2	1	2	✓		B	B	E	20	29
Shropshire CC	T	✓	0	3	2	3	2	3	N	11	3	3	2	3	3		52.9	D	C	E	26	45
Somerset CC	C+		0	2	2	2	1	3	1	7	2	1	2	1	2			C	A	E	17	31
Staffordshire CC	C+		0	2	2	2	1	3	1	6	3	1	1	1	0			B	B	C	14	27
Suffolk CC	C+	✓	0	2	2	3	2	3	N	10	2	3	3	1	3	✓		C	C	F	24	34
Surrey CC	T		0	3	3	2	3	3	1	11	2	3	3	3	3		53.1	C	D	E	29	47
Warwickshire CC	T	✓	0	3	3	0	3	3	2	8	1	3	2	0	2		8.3	C	C	D	22	29
West Sussex CC	C+		0	2	2	2	3	3	N	6	2	1	2	2	2		28.2	D	F	E	21	28
Wiltshire CC	C+	✓	0	3	2	1	2	3	1	11	1	3	2	2	3		29.1	D	D	E	24	40
Worcestershire CC	C+		0	2	2	2	1	3	1	7	2	1	1	2	1			B	D	C	15	25

See start of this appendix for explanation of contents of this table

Shire districts

Organisation	Site classification 2006	Improvement from 2005	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3	Currency	Links elsewhere	News value	E-mail response (days)	Services	Participation	Use of search	A to Z	Location	Navigation	Accessibility	Readability	Resilience (errors)	Resilience (availability)	Resilience (home page)	Scenarios and themes	'Yes' to questions
Adur DC	C+		2	0	2	2	2	3	1	5	2	3	2	2	3			B	D	B	23	38
Allerdale BC	C+		1	0	1	1	3	3	N	3	1	2	1	1	1			B	E	D	14	18
Alnwick DC	C+		1	0	0	2	2	3	1	4	2	1	2	0	1			A	F	E	13	20
Amber Valley BC	C		2	0	0	0	2		N	2	0	1	1	2	1			B	B	F	12	22
Arun DC	C+	✓	2	0	2	2	1	2	1	5	1	2	2	2	2			C	D	C	20	23
Ashfield DC	C		1	0	2	1	2		1	7	0	2	2	2	2			C	C	E	17	28
Ashford BC	C+		3	0	1	2	2	3	1	4	1	1	0	2	2		40.6	C	C	E	19	26
Aylesbury Vale DC	C+		2	0	3	2	2	2	3	7	1	2	2	2	2			A	D	A	20	29
Babergh DC	C		2	0	1	2	2		1	3	2	1	2	1	2			B	C	D	16	25
Barrow-in-Furness BC	C+		2	0	1	2	2	3	N	7	1	2	2	2	3			B	B	D	20	35
Basildon DC	T	✓	1	0	2	2	3	3	9	7	2	2	2	2	2		31.0	C	E	E	21	27
Basingstoke & Deane BC	C		2	0	1	1	2		N	2	1	0	2	0	2			B	G	C	14	23
Bassetlaw DC	C	✓	2	0	1	1	2		N	6	0	1	1	1	2			B	H	E	15	31
Bedford BC	C		2	0	1	2	1		1	4	3	0	2	1	1			B	D	D	13	17
Berwick-upon-Tweed BC	C		1	0	1	0	1		1	1	0	1	2	1	1			D	G	C	11	12
Blaby DC	C+	✓	2	0	3	2	2	3	1	10	1	2	2	2	3			C	F	E	22	36
Blyth Valley BC	C		1	0	0	0	1		1	0	0	0	1	0	1			B	G	F	6	7
Bolsover DC	C+	✓	0	2	2	1	2	3	N	5	1	2	2	2	2			C	C	C	18	29
Boston BC	C		1	0	2	2	1		2	4	2	1	2	1	1			C	C	F	14	16
Braintree DC	C		2	0	0	1	2		1	2	1	1	1	1	2			B	A	D	14	19
Breckland DC	C		2	3	2	2	3		1	5	2	1	2	0	2			B	B	D	20	26
Brentwood BC	C		3	0	0	1	3		N	5	2	1	1	0	1			C	C	F	14	25
Bridgnorth DC	C		1	0	1	1	1		2	2	0	1	2	1	1	✓		B	B	D	12	17
Broadland DC	C		1	2	2	2	2		1	4	2	2	2	0	2			B	B	E	18	23
Bromsgrove DC	C		2	0	2	1	2		2	1	0	1	2	1	2			B	G	C	16	24
Broxbourne BC	C		2	0	1	1	1		1	5	0	1	2	1	3			A	C	C	16	22
Broxtowe BC	C		2	0	1	1	3		1	5	0	1	1	1	1			B	B	E	16	27
Burnley BC	T	✓	2	2	1	2	2	3	4	8	2	2	3	2	2		31.4	B	E	E	22	37
Cambridge City	C		2	1	1	1	1		N	5	2	2	2	1	1			D	G	E	14	30
Cannock Chase DC	C+	✓	2	0	1	2	2	3	1	2	2	2	2	2	3			C	D	E	19	27
Canterbury City	T	✓	2	0	3	2	3	3	1	7	2	2	2	2	2		70.5	C	B	D	24	35
Caradon DC	C		1	0	1	1	2		1	1	0	3	1	2	3			B	C	E	16	18
Carlisle City	C		2	0	1	1	2		N	2	0	1	1	1	2			C	C	F	14	21
Carrick DC	C		2	0	2	1	3		3	1	0	2	2	2	2			B	C	F	18	24
Castle Morpeth BC	C+		1	0	0	3	2	3	1	4	2	1	2	1	2	✓		B	G	E	16	23
Castle Point BC	C+		3	0	0	1	2	3	1	4	1	1	0	1	2			C	G	F	15	27
Charnwood BC	C+		1	0	2	2	2	3	2	5	2	2	2	1	2			C	B	D	18	29
Chelmsford BC	C+	✓	2	0	2	2	2	3	N	5	1	2	2	1	3			B	G	E	19	29
Cheltenham BC	C+		2	0	1	2	3	3	1	3	2	2	2	1	2			C	A	E	19	28
Cherwell DC	C+		1	0	1	2	3	3	N	6	1	2	1	1	2			C	B	D	18	26
Chester City	T		3	3	2	2	2	3	1	8	3	1	1	2	0		61.8	C	E	C	22	34
Chesterfield BC	C+	✓	0	2	2	1	3	3	1	7	2	2	3	2	2			B	G	D	21	32
Chester-le-Street DC	C		1	0	1	0	2	3	1	3	0	2	2	1	0			B	C	E	13	19
Chichester DC	C+		2	0	2	2	2	3	1	4	3	2	2	3	3	✓		B	A	D	23	34
Chiltern DC	C+		2	0	1	1	2	3	2	5	0	3	2	1	2	✓		B	E	E	18	26

See start of this appendix for explanation of contents of this table

Shire districts

Organisation	Site classification 2006	Improvement from 2005	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3	Currency	Links elsewhere	News value	E-mail response (days)	Services	Participation	Use of search	A to Z	Location	Navigation	Accessibility	Readability	Resilience (errors)	Resilience (availability)	Resilience (home page)	Scenarios and themes	'Yes' to questions
Chorley BC	C		1	0	0	1	2		1	3	2	0	1	1	1			B	H	F	10	19
Christchurch BC	C+	✓	2	0	2	1	3	3	1	7	1	3	3	1	3	(✓)			I	F	23	35
Colchester DC	C+		2	0	2	1	1	3	1	5	1	2	1	1	2			C	H	C	16	27
Congleton BC	C+	✓	1	0	1	1	2	3	1	6	2	0	0	1	2			C	E	B	12	27
Copeland BC	C	✓	1	0	2	1	2		1	2	2	2	1	1	2			C	C	F	14	17
Corby BC	C		2	0	1	1	2		N	3	1	1	0	1	1			B	F	E	10	19
Cotswold DC	T		3	0	2	2	2	3	1	5	1	2	2	2	3		53.5	C	C	E	24	33
Craven DC	C	✓	1	0	1	1	1		4	1	1	1	1	0	1			D	H	F	10	12
Crawley BC	C+	✓	1	0	2	3	2	3	2	6	3	2	2	1	2			B	C	C	18	26
Crewe & Nantwich BC	C		1	2	2	1	1		N	1	1	0	1	1	2			B	B	C	13	16
Dacorum BC	C		2	0	1	1	1		1	1	0	1	2	1	1	✓		B	D	E	14	14
Dartford BC	C+		2	0	1	2	2	3	1	4	0	2	2	1	2			C	A	F	18	24
Daventry DC	C		2	0	2	1	2		2	2	3	1	3	1	2	✓		C	C	D	16	23
Derbyshire Dales DC	C+	✓	1	2	1	1	2	3	N	6	0	2	2	2	2			D	G	F	18	32
Derwentside DC	C+		1	0	1	2	3	3	1	8	2	3	3	1	3			D	C	C	22	29
Dover DC	C+		3	0	1	2	2	3	8	4	1	2	2	1	2			B	B	B	20	30
Durham City	C		1	0	1	1	1		1	2	2	1	1	0	2	✓		A	B	B	12	17
Easington DC	P		0	0	0	1	1		3	0	0	1	0	0	1			B	A	C	7	10
East Cambridgeshire DC	C+		1	1	0	1	2	3	1	7	1	1	3	1	1			D	E	F	15	25
East Devon DC	C+		2	0	2	2	1	3	3	7	2	2	1	1	2			D	B	E	17	32
East Dorset DC	C+	✓	2	0	2	1	3	3	N	7	1	3	2	1	3	(✓)			I	F	22	36
East Hampshire DC	C		1	0	1	0	1		1	1	0	1	1	0	1			C	F	B	9	18
East Hertfordshire DC	C+		2	0	1	1	3	1	1	5	1	2	3	0	1			C	D	F	18	21
East Lindsey DC	C+		1	0	1	2	3	3	1	4	2	1	2	1	2			B	F	E	17	25
East Northamptonshire DC	C		2	0	2	0	2		1	5	0	2	2	0	2	✓		B	A	D	16	24
East Staffordshire BC	C+		2	3	1	2	2	3	N	1	2	0	2	1	1			B	B	D	15	24
Eastbourne BC	C+	✓	2	0	1	2	3	3	1	6	2	2	3	2	3			C	B	D	23	30
Eastleigh BC	C+	✓	2	0	1	2	2	3	2	5	2	1	2	3	2			B	C	C	19	29
Eden DC	C		1	0	2	1	2		1	4	0	3	2	1	3			B	C	D	19	23
Ellesmere Port & Neston BC	P		0	2	0	0	1		1	1	0	0	1	2	1			C	G	F	9	7
Elmbridge BC	C+		3	0	3	2	3	3	1	8	2	1	3	1	3	✓		A	F	E	23	35
Epping Forest DC	C		1	0	3	0	2		N	6	0	1	1	1	1			D	E	D	14	23
Epsom & Ewell BC	C+		2	0	2	1	3	3	1	8	0	3	2	1	2			C	A	E	21	33
Erewash BC	C		2	2	2	2	2		1	6	1	2	2	2	2	✓		D	C	F	21	35
Exeter City	T		2	0	2	1	3	3	1	7	1	2	2	1	3		45.4	C	A	E	21	36
Fareham BC	C		1	0	0	0	2		2	1	0	0	1	1	1			C	B	C	10	18
Fenland DC	C	✓	1	0	1	0	1		2	1	0	1	2	1	2			C	E	E	12	16
Forest Heath DC	C		1	0	1	1	1		7	1	0	3	0	1	2			C	D	E	13	13
Forest of Dean DC	C+	✓	2	0	1	1	1	1	N	5	0	2	2	1	2			C	B	D	17	27
Fylde BC	C		3	0	2	1	1	3	N	5	1	0	2	0	1			C	C	D	13	23
Gedling BC	C		1	0	1	1	1		3	4	1	3	1	2	1	✓		B	E	E	14	25
Gloucester City	C+		2	0	2	2	1	3	2	4	2	2	1	1	1			B	B	E	17	27
Gosport BC	C+		1	0	2	2	1	3	9	3	2	1	1	1	1			B	B	E	14	22
Gravesham BC	C+	✓	2	0	2	2	2	3	1	3	0	2	2	1	3			B	G	C	20	27
Great Yarmouth BC	C		1	2	2	2	2		N	6	2	2	2	0	2			B	B	E	18	24

See start of this appendix for explanation of contents of this table

Shire districts

Organisation	Site classification 2006	Improvement from 2005	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3	Currency	Links elsewhere	News value	E-mail response (days)	Services	Participation	Use of search	A to Z	Location	Navigation	Accessibility	Readability	Resilience (errors)	Resilience (availability)	Resilience (home page)	Scenarios and themes	'Yes' to questions
Guildford BC	C+		2	0	3	2	3	3	1	9	3	1	1	3	2			B	C	C	21	38
Hambleton DC	C		1	0	1	1	2		1	4	2	1	1	1	2			C	B	C	12	26
Harborough DC	C+	✓	2	0	1	1	2	2	N	5	0	2	2	2	3			A	D	C	18	28
Harlow DC	C		2	0	1	1	2		5	2	2	1	1	0	2	✓		I		D	13	22
Harrogate BC	C+	✓	2	0	1	2	3	3	4	9	2	2	2	1	2			C	G	D	19	37
Hart DC	P		1	0	1	0	1		N	4	0	0	1	0	1			C	G	B	9	16
Hastings	C+		1	0	2	3	3	2	2	6	3	2	2	2	3			B	C	D	23	29
Havant BC	C+		1	0	2	1	2	3	1	4	1	2	2	1	1			B	F	E	16	24
Hertsmere BC	C		1	0	3	1	2		1	4	0	1	3	0	2			D	C	D	17	15
High Peak BC	C		2	0	2	1	1		3	4	0	2	1	0	2			B	B	B	14	24
Hinckley & Bosworth BC	C+	✓	3	0	1	2	2	2	N	8	1	2	3	0	2	✓		C	C	E	20	29
Horsham DC	C+	✓	2	0	2	1	2	3	6	4	1	2	1	2	2			C	C	B	18	28
Huntingdonshire DC	C		1	0	1	0	1		1	3	0	2	0	1	2	✓		C	A	E	11	22
Hyndburn BC	C		1	1	1	1	1		N	1	1	0	1	1	1			D	G	D	10	14
Ipswich BC	C		1	0	1	1	2	1	N	5	1	2	2	1	2			B	B	F	17	25
Kennet DC	C		1	0	2	1	2		2	4	2	2	2	0	1			D	C	F	14	24
Kerrier DC	C		2	0	2	1	2		1	4	1	2	2	1	2			B	G	F	17	21
Kettering BC	C+		1	0	2	2	3	3	1	4	1	2	2	0	2	✓		B	E	F	19	22
King's Lynn & West Norfolk BC	C+	✓	2	2	2	2	2	3	2	3	2	1	2	2	1			C	G	E	19	29
Lancaster City	C+		2	3	2	2	2	3	1	6	1	2	2	2	2			C	E	E	23	35
Lewes DC	C+	✓	2	0	2	3	3	3	N	9	2	3	3	2	3			A	B	E	26	36
Lichfield DC	C+	✓	1	3	1	2	2	3	1	3	2	3	2	2	3			B	B	E	22	32
Lincoln City	C		1	0	1	0	2		1	3	0	1	3	1	2	✓		B	F	D	14	23
Macclesfield BC	C+		0	2	2	1	2	3	N	2	1	0	0	1	0			C	C	E	10	20
Maidstone BC	T		1	0	2	2	0	2	1	5	1	2	2	2	2		62.6	C	D	F	18	24
Maldon DC	C		1	0	0	1	1		3	2	2	1	1	1	1			C	G	E	9	18
Malvern Hills DC	C+	✓	1	0	2	2	2	2	N	7	2	1	2	2	2			C	E	C	18	29
Mansfield DC	C		1	0	1	1	1		1	6	0	1	1	1	1	✓		B	C	D	12	19
Melton BC	C		2	0	1	0	1	3	1	2	0	1	1	1	2	✓		B	B	D	13	18
Mendip DC	C		2	0	1	1	3		1	4	0	1	2	1	2			B	H	D	16	26
Mid Bedfordshire DC	C		2	0	1	2	1		1	4	1	2	0	0	1	✓		B	G	D	12	30
Mid Devon DC	C+	✓	2	0	1	1	3	3	N	5	1	2	3	1	2			C	D	F	17	28
Mid Suffolk DC	C+		2	0	1	1	3	2	2	1	0	3	2	3	2			D	C	F	20	25
Mid Sussex DC	C+	✓	2	0	2	1	2	1	1	5	1	2	2	1	3	✓		C	B	B	20	34
Mole Valley DC	C+		2	0	3	1	3	3	1	5	0	2	2	2	3			C	G	B	23	35
New Forest DC	C+	✓	1	0	3	1	1	3	N	2	1	2	1	2	2			D	F	C	16	26
Newark & Sherwood DC	C		2	0	2	0	2		1	4	0	1	1	0	1			B	C	D	13	24
Newcastle-under- Lyme BC	C+		2	2	1	2	3	3	8	6	1	2	1	1	3			C	C	E	20	34
North Cornwall DC	C		1	0	2	1	2	2	2	1	0	2	2	2	3			B	G	C	17	22
North Devon DC	C		1	0	1	1	1		1	4	0	1	1	0	1			B	C	E	9	25
North Dorset DC	C+	✓	2	0	1	1	2	3	2	2	2	1	2	1	2			C	D	D	16	28
North East Derbyshire DC	C		2	2	2	1	2		N	4	0	2	2	0	0			B	C	D	16	22
North Hertfordshire DC	C+		3	0	2	1	3	3	2	3	0	3	3	0	3			B	B	E	23	23
North Kesteven DC	C+		2	0	2	2	3	3	1	8	1	3	2	2	3			B	F	C	24	35
North Norfolk DC	C+		1	2	1	1	2	3	N	7	0	2	2	0	3			A	C	A	18	29

See start of this appendix for explanation of contents of this table

Shire districts

Organisation	Site classifiaction 2006	Improvement from 2005	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3	Currency	Links elsewhere	News value	E-mail response (days)	Services	Participation	Use of search	A to Z	Location	Navigation	Accessibility	Readability	Resilience (errors)	Resilience (availability)	Resilience (home page)	Scenarios and themes	'Yes' to questions
North Shropshire DC	C		1	0	1	1	1		1	1	0	1	2	0	2	✓		B	C	D	12	16
North Warwickshire BC	C+		1	0	2	1	3	3	1	5	0	2	2	0	2	✓			I	E	18	23
North West Leicestershire DC	C+	✓	2	0	2	2	3	3	1	6	1	2	2	1	2			C	F	E	21	32
North Wiltshire DC	C		1	0	2	1	1		6	7	1	3	1	0	1			C	C	D	14	26
Northampton BC	C		0	0	2	1	2	2	2	5	1	1	2	0	1			B	D	E	12	19
Norwich City	C		1	2	1	1	2		4	5	2	1	2	1	1			C	C	F	15	25
Nuneaton & Bedworth BC	C+		2	0	2	2	3	3	1	7	2	2	2	1	2			A	B	C	22	29
Oadby & Wigston BC	C		2	0	1	1	1		2	0	0	1	0	0	2			B	C	C	12	17
Oswestry BC	C		1	0	1	1	1		N	1	0	2	1	0	2			B	C	F	13	16
Oxford City	C+		2	0	1	2	3	3	N	4	2	2	2	1	2			B	B	D	19	28
Pendle BC	C+	✓	2	2	0	1	2	3	N	6	0	2	2	1	2	✓		B	G	C	18	29
Penwith DC	C		2	0	1	1	3		1	3	0	2	1	1	3			C	F	E	17	21
Preston City	C		2	1	0	2	2	3	2	1	2	1	1	1	2			B	F	D	15	20
Purbeck DC	C		2	0	1	1	2		N	3	1	1	1	0	1			C	C	E	13	22
Redditch BC	C		1	0	1	2	1		6	4	2	2	1	0	1			E	B	F	12	24
Reigate & Banstead BC	C+	✓	3	0	3	2	2	3	1	10	2	3	1	2	3	✓		B	A	D	25	37
Restormel BC	C		2	0	2	1	2		N	0	1	3	2	1	3			B	D	D	19	28
Ribble Valley BC	C		0	1	1	1	2		3	7	0	2	3	1	2			D	B	F	16	30
Richmondshire DC	C		1	0	1	1	1		2	1	1	1	2	0	2			B	E	E	13	21
Rochford DC	C+		2	0	2	1	1	3	1	4	1	2	2	1	2			C	H	F	17	27
Rossendale BC	C		2	2	1	1	2		N	5	1	2	2	0	2	✓		B	C	E	17	27
Rother DC	C+		2	0	1	1	3	2	1	4	0	1	3	1	2			B	D	E	18	30
Rugby BC	C+	✓	1	0	2	1	1	3	N	5	0	3	2	0	3	✓		B	D	E	17	25
Runnymede BC	C		3	0	2	1	1		N	5	1	2	2	0	1			B	B	D	16	23
Rushcliffe BC	C+		2	0	2	1	1	3	1	4	1	2	2	0	2			C	C	C	16	25
Rushmoor BC	C+		2	0	1	2	2	3	2	3	2	2	2	2	2			B	H	C	17	32
Ryedale DC	C		1	0	1	2	2		2	4	3	3	2	1	2			C	D	D	18	26
Salisbury DC	C+		3	0	1	1	3	3	N	4	1	2	3	3	2		53.2	B	F	D	24	30
Scarborough BC	C		1	0	1	1	2		N	6	0	1	2	2	2			B	B	E	15	29
Sedgefield BC	C		2	0	2	2	2		1	6	2	2	2	0	2			C	C	E	19	27
Sedgemoor DC	C		2	0	1	2	2		1	3	1	1	0	1	1			B	C	D	13	22
Selby DC	C		1	0	1	1	1		N	5	1	1	2	2	1			D	H	C	14	23
Sevenoaks DC	C+	✓	2	0	2	2	3	3	1	4	0	2	2	1	2			B	A	D	21	29
Shepway DC	C+	✓	1	0	0	1	2	2	3	1	0	2	2	0	2	✓		B	F	C	15	18
Shrewsbury & Atcham BC	T		3	0	2	2	3	3	1	9	3	3	3	2	3		69.8	C	B	D	27	42
South Bedfordshire DC	C		2	0	2	2	1		N	6	2	2	2	1	2			B	D	D	17	28
South Buckinghamshire DC	C		1	0	1	1	2		1	2	0	2	2	1	2			B	G	E	15	17
South Cambridgeshire DC	C		0	3	2	2	2		1	4	2	1	3	1	0			C	E	D	16	23
South Derbyshire DC	C+	✓	2	2	2	2	2	3	4	8	1	2	2	2	0			D	B	E	19	32
South Hams DC	C+	✓	2	0	2	1	2	3	N	4	0	2	1	1	2			B	C	D	16	32
South Holland DC	C+	✓	2	0	1	1	3	1	1	5	1	1	3	3	2			B	G	F	21	31
South Kesteven DC	C		1	0	1	2	2		1	2	3	2	2	0	1	✓		B	D	E	15	18
South Lakeland DC	C+		2	0	2	1	3	3	1	7	0	3	2	2	3			C	B	E	22	33
South Norfolk DC	C		2	0	1	2	2		1	2	3	1	1	0	1			B	A	D	13	16
South Northamptonshire DC	C+	✓	2	0	1	0	2	3	1	3	0	1	2	0	3			D	B	F	15	24

See start of this appendix for explanation of contents of this table

Shire districts / Organisation	Site classifiction 2006	Improvement from 2005	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3	Currency	Links elsewhere	News value	E-mail response (days)	Services	Participation	Use of search	A to Z	Location	Navigation	Accessibility	Readability	Resilience (errors)	Resilience (availability)	Resilience (home page)	Scenarios and themes	'Yes' to questions
South Oxfordshire DC	C+		3	0	1	2	3	3	N	7	1	2	2	3	2		39.6	C	G	E	23	35
South Ribble BC	C		2	0	0	0	2		2	4	0	2	1	1	1			C	B	D	12	24
South Shropshire DC	C+		1	0	2	1	3	3	N	7	3	2	3	1	2			C	C	D	19	32
South Somerset DC	C		1	0	1	1	2		3	2	0	2	2	2	2			D	C	F	17	24
South Staffordshire DC	C		1	2	2	1	2		1	6	1	2	1	2	2			B	H	E	18	32
Spelthorne BC	C+		3	0	3	1	3	3	N	6	1	2	2	3	2			B	G	D	23	37
St Alban's City	C+	✓	3	0	1	2	3	3	1	4	0	1	3	1	2			C	C	E	19	23
St Edmondsbury BC	C+	✓	3	0	2	3	3	3	N	7	2	3	2	2	2			C	G	E	25	35
Stafford BC	C		1	2	1	0	1		2	2	1	1	1	1	2			B	G	E	12	21
Staffordshire Moorlands DC	C+		1	3	1	1	2	3	N	3	1	1	2	2	2		36.7	C	B	D	18	26
Stevenage BC	C		2	0	1	1	1		1	3	0	1	2	1	1			D	C	E	14	14
Stratford-on-Avon DC	C+	✓	3	0	2	1	1	3	1	2	1	1	1	1	2			B	E	D	16	24
Stroud DC	T		3	0	2	2	3	3	3	7	1	2	2	3	2		50.9	A	H	D	25	37
Suffolk Coastal DC	C+	✓	2	0	1	2	3	3	N	6	2	2	2	2	3			C	D	F	21	36
Surrey Heath BC	T		2	0	3	2	3	3	1	8	2	2	3	2	3		62.4	B	E	C	25	38
Swale BC	C		1	0	1	2	2		2	4	2	1	2	0	2			C	F	E	14	23
Tamworth BC	C		1	3	1	1	2		1	5	2	0	1	2	1			D	C	E	15	25
Tandridge DC	T	✓	2	0	2	3	3	3	N	11	2	2	3	1	2		11.7	C	C	E	23	37
Taunton Deane BC	C+		2	0	2	2	3	2	1	6	2	1	2	2	2	✓		B	C	C	21	35
Teesdale DC	C		2	0	1	1	2		3	4	1	1	1	1	1			B	E	D	14	20
Teignbridge DC	C+	✓	1	0	2	1	2	3	5	7	1	1	2	1	2			B	C	D	15	31
Tendring DC	C+	✓	1	0	1	2	2	1	N	4	2	2	2	1	2			B	B	B	16	22
Test Valley BC	C		1	0	2	1	1		1	4	1	1	1	0	2			B	C	F	13	23
Tewkesbury BC	C+	✓	1	0	2	1	2	3	N	4	1	2	2	1	2			D	B	E	18	21
Thanet DC	C+		1	0	0	2	3	3	3	5	1	2	2	1	2			C	C	E	18	27
Three Rivers DC	C+		2	0	1	1	3	2	1	3	0	2	2	1	3			B	G	D	21	21
Tonbridge & Malling BC	C+	✓	1	0	2	3	3	3	1	8	2	2	2	2	2		42.5	B	G	C	23	28
Torridge DC	C		1	0	1	1	2		1	3	0	1	2	1	2			C	C	D	13	23
Tunbridge Wells BC	C+	✓	2	0	1	2	3	3	1	2	2	1	2	2	2			C	C	A	20	25
Tynedale DC	C+		2	0	3	0	3	3	1	4	0	2	1	1	1			A	C	C	18	24
Uttlesford DC	C+		1	0	2	1	1	3	N	4	3	1	1	2	1			B	A	E	13	25
Vale of White Horse DC	C		1	2	2	2	1	3	1	6	1	2	2	1	2			B	C	D	20	24
Vale Royal BC	C+	✓	0	0	2	1	3	3	1	3	1	2	2	1	1			D	E	D	14	22
Wansbeck DC	C+		1	0	0	1	2	3	1	6	2	1	2	1	2			C	G	C	13	24
Warwick DC	T	✓	3	0	2	1	3	3	2	6	0	2	3	1	3	✓	10.1	B	C	E	24	35
Watford BC	C+	✓	2	0	1	1	3	3	1	6	0	3	3	1	3			B	B	F	23	26
Waveney DC	C		2	0	2	1	2		12	4	1	2	2	0	2			B	B	D	16	22
Waverley BC	C+		3	0	3	2	3	3	1	7	1	2	3	2	1			B	B	D	22	34
Wealden DC	T		2	0	2	2	3	3	1	7	2	3	0	3	3		48.1	C	B	D	24	38
Wear Valley DC	C+		2	0	1	2	2	3	1	7	3	2	2	1	2			A	B	C	18	31
Wellingborough BC	C+	✓	0	0	1	2	3	3	6	5	1	2	2	1	2			B	C	D	18	23
Welwyn Hatfield DC	C+		1	0	1	1	3	3	N	2	0	2	1	1	2			C	B	F	17	23
West Devon BC	C		1	0	2	1	2		1	7	2	1	2	1	1			D	I	D	14	30
West Dorset DC	C+		1	0	2	3	3	3	1	8	3	3	2	1	3	(✓)				E	23	35
West Lancashire DC	T	✓	2	3	2	2	3	3	1	6	2	2	2	1	3		12.0	B	H	E	24	32

See start of this appendix for explanation of contents of this table

Shire districts

Organisation	Site classification 2006	Improvement from 2005	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3	Currency	Links elsewhere	News value	E-mail response (days)	Services	Participation	Use of search	A to Z	Location	Navigation	Accessibility	Readability	Resilience (errors)	Resilience (availability)	Resilience (home page)	Scenarios and themes	'Yes' to questions
West Lindsey DC	C+	✓	2	0	2	2	3	3	2	7	1	3	2	2	3			C	F	C	23	30
West Oxfordshire DC	T	✓	1	1	1	1	3	3	N	4	0	2	2	0	3		29.0	B	B	D	18	23
West Somerset DC	C		2	0	1	1	3		1	2	1	1	2	0	1			B	D	C	14	22
West Wiltshire DC	C+		1	0	1	2	3	3	1	5	2	1	2	2	2			B	B	D	19	28
Weymouth & Portland BC	C+		1	0	1	1	2	3	1	5	1	2	2	0	2	✓		D	B	D	15	26
Winchester City	C		1	0	1	0	1		1	2	0	1	1	1	2	✓		C	E	E	10	21
Woking BC	C+		2	0	2	2	3	3	1	9	3	3	3	1	3	✓		C	B	C	25	35
Worcester City	C		1	0	2	2	2		1	3	2	1	2	0	1			E	G	E	13	22
Worthing BC	C+	✓	2	0	1	2	2	3	1	6	2	2	1	2	2			C	B	B	18	30
Wychavon DC	C+	✓	1	0	1	2	2	3	1	7	2	1	2	2	2			B	E		17	28
Wycombe DC	C+		2	0	2	2	2	3	2	4	2	2	2	2	3			B	C		20	32
Wyre BC	C+	✓	2	2	1	0	2	3	1	3	0	2	2	2	2			B	C		18	30
Wyre Forest DC	C		1	0	1	2	1	3	4	4	2	1	2	1	2			B	C		14	20

See start of this appendix for explanation of contents of this table

London boroughs

Organisation	Site classification 2006	Improvement from 2005	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3	Currency	Links elsewhere	News value	E-mail response (days)	Services	Participation	Use of search	A to Z	Location	Navigation	Accessibility	Readability	Resilience (errors)	Resilience (availability)	Resilience (home page)	Scenarios and themes	'Yes' to questions
Barking & Dagenham	T		2	2	1	2	3	3	2	6	2	2	1	1	2		48.5	B	G	B	20	36
Barnet	C+		2	2	2	1	3	3	1	3	1	1	1	1	1			C	B	B	16	30
Bexley	C+		2	2	1	3	2	3	3	6	2	3	2	2	2			C	A	D	25	35
Brent	T		2	2	2	3	2	3	N	9	3	3	3	3	2		74.9	B	G	D	28	43
Bromley	T	✓	1	2	2	1	3	3	1	6	1	2	3	2	3		53.1	D	C	F	24	37
Camden	T		3	3	2	2	3	3	3	8	2	3	3	2	3		62.5	B	H	E	30	46
Corporation of London	T		3	3	1	2	0	3	N	6	2	3	3	3	3		39.8	B	C	F	27	41
Croydon	C+		1	1	2	1	2	1	2	3	2	1	2	1	0			B	E	E	14	26
Ealing	C		2	2	2	1	2		1	4	2	1	2	0	1			C	D	E	16	29
Enfield	C		2	2	3	1	2		N	5	1	2	1	0	1			C	C	F	17	31
Greenwich	C+		2	2	1	1	2	3	1	4	1	2	1	1	2			C	C	D	19	29
Hackney	C+		1	3	1	1	3	3	1	6	0	2	2	0	2			D	D	E	19	28
Hammersmith & Fulham	C+		3	2	0	1	2	3	N	6	1	2	2	2	2			D	G	D	20	36
Haringey	U		0	0	0	0	0	0	N	0	0	0	0	0	0							
Harrow	C+		3	2	3	2	3	3	3	7	2	2	1	0	1			C	A	D	19	34
Havering	T	✓	3	2	3	3	3	3	1	8	3	3	3	1	3		55.4	A	E	C	29	42
Hillingdon	T		3	2	2	2	3	3	3	9	3	2	2	1	2		43.1	B	A	C	24	39
Hounslow	C		1	1	2	2	2		1	7	1	2	2	1	2			B	A	D	18	29
Islington	C+		1	2	3	1	2	3	N	7	3	3	2	2	2			C	B	E	22	34
Kensington & Chelsea	T		3	2	3	2	2	3	N	7	2	2	3	3	3	✓✓	47.4	B	B	C	28	43
Kingston	C+		2	2	2	2	2	3	1	7	2	0	1	2	1			B	C	B	17	30
Lambeth	T	✓	2	2	3	2	3	3	1	8	2	2	3	3	2		33.5	B	B	C	28	43
Lewisham	T	✓	1	3	3	3	2	3	N	8	3	2	2	3	3	✓	60.8	D	C	E	26	39
Merton	C+		3	2	2	1	2	3	1	8	1	3	2	1	2	✓		B	F	E	22	41
Newham	C+		1	2	2	1	2	3	1	9	1	1	1	2	1			D	B	E	17	26
Redbridge	C+		3	3	2	2	3	3	1	5	2	2	2	1	3			B	G	E	26	34
Richmond	C+		1	2	2	2	3	3	1	8	2	2	2	1	2			B	A	E	22	37
Southwark	T	✓	2	2	3	1	3	3	N	10	2	2	2	2	1		7.3	B	E	E	22	44
Sutton	C+		2	3	2	0	2	3	N	4	0	3	2	1	1			C	B	E	18	31
Tower Hamlets	T		1	3	2	2	2	3	1	11	3	2	2	1	2	✓	49.4	C	D	F	21	42
Waltham Forest	C+		1	2	2	1	2	3	11	4	1	0	2	0	2			C	B	D	15	31
Wandsworth	T		3	2	3	2	3	3	N	8	3	3	2	3	2		39.3	B	E	D	28	47
Westminster	T		3	2	2	2	3	3	4	8	2	2	3	3	2		59.4	B	G	E	27	45

Note: When we came to review it, the Haringey website was out of service in the last 10 days
of the review period as a result of the Buncefield oil depot disaster. It was separately
assessed in February 2006 as C+, but its results have not been included in the analyses.

See start of this appendix for explanation of contents of this table

Metropolitan districts

Organisation	Site classifiaction 2006	Improvement from 2005	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3	Currency	Links elsewhere	News value	E-mail response (days)	Services	Participation	Use of search	A to Z	Location	Navigation	Accessibility	Readability	Resilience (errors)	Resilience (availability)	Resilience (home page)	Scenarios and themes	'Yes' to questions
Barnsley MBC	C+		1	2	2	1	2	3	4	4	2	1	0	2	1			C	C	C	16	24
Birmingham City	T		2	2	2	2	1	3	3	7	2	2	1	1	2		16.6	C	C	F	20	27
Bolton MBC	C		1	0	2	1	1		2	3	1	0	1	1	1			C	F	E	10	19
Bradford City	C		2	2	2	2	1		1	6	2	2	1	0	1			B	H	E	16	29
Bury MBC	C+		2	1	1	1	2	3	10	6	1	2	0	1	2			D	A	F	16	33
Calderdale MBC	C+	✓	1	1	1	1	2	3	N	7	1	2	3	2	2			B	A	C	21	32
Coventry City	C+	✓	3	3	3	2	2	3	2	6	1	2	3	1	3	✓		B	C	D	28	36
Doncaster MBC	C+		1	3	3	1	2	3	1	6	1	2	2	0	2			C	E	D	21	34
Dudley MBC	T		3	2	2	3	2	3	1	6	2	2	2	1	0		33.8	B	C	C	23	28
Gateshead MBC	C+		1	2	2	3	1	2	1	8	2	1	2	0	2			B	B	D	19	28
Kirklees MBC	T		2	3	2	3	3	3	1	9	2	3	3	3	3		46.1	B	F	C	31	46
Knowsley MBC	C+	✓	2	2	2	1	2	3	N	7	0	1	1	1	2			B	C	D	18	30
Leeds City	C+		1	2	1	2	3	3	1	7	1	3	0	1	2			B	B	C	20	33
Liverpool City	T		2	2	2	2	3	3	N	8	2	3	3	1	3		41.7	B	B	D	25	36
Manchester City	C+		2	2	2	1	2	3	5	5	1	2	2	1	2			C	B	C	18	33
Newcastle upon Tyne City	C+		3	2	1	3	3	3	1	8	2	1	2	2	1			D	E	E	22	34
North Tyneside MBC	C+		2	2	1	1	3	3	1	2	1	2	2	1	2	✓		C	C	F	20	33
Oldham MBC	C+		1	1	1	2	2	3	1	6	2	2	2	0	1	✓		A	B	C	16	24
Rochdale MBC	C		1	1	2	1	2		7	4	1	1	1	2	1			C	F	C	15	26
Rotherham MBC	C+		2	2	2	2	3	2	7	6	2	2	1	1	3			C	G	B	23	33
Salford City	T		1	2	3	3	3	3	N	12	3	2	2	1	2		36.7	B	E	C	22	47
Sandwell MBC	C+		1	1	3	2	2	3	11	5	3	2	3	1	2			D	C	F	21	22
Sefton MBC	C+		2	2	2	1	2	3	2	5	0	1	1	1	3			C	F	C	19	29
Sheffield City	C+		1	3	2	1	2	2	2	5	1	2	2	1	2			C	F	C	19	31
Solihull MBC	C+		1	2	3	2	1	3	N	8	2	1	0	2	2			B	F	D	17	25
South Tyneside MBC	T		1	2	1	3	2	3	N	6	2	1	2	1	1		49.6	B	B	D	19	26
St Helens MBC	C+		2	3	2	2	1	3	7	6	2	1	1	1	2			C	F	E	19	31
Stockport MBC	C		1	1	1	0	1		1	2	0	2	2	0	1			B	A	B	11	23
Sunderland City	C		2	2	1	1	1		1	2	0	1	2	1	1			D	G	E	15	20
Tameside MBC	T		1	2	2	1	1	3	1	6	3	3	2	2	1		68.1	B	B	D	18	38
Trafford MBC	T	✓	1	2	2	1	2	3	1	6	1	2	2	1	2		10.2	B	B	D	19	39
Wakefield MDC	C+		1	2	2	1	2	3	N	8	1	3	2	3	2			A	A	D	23	37
Walsall MBC	C		0	1	2	1	1	3	6	6	1	2	2	0	2			B	D	B	15	24
Wigan MBC	C+		2	2	0	1	1	3	1	6	1	1	2	1	0			C	B	D	13	28
Wirral MBC	C		2	2	2	2	2		N	4	2	2	1	2	1			B	C	B	19	28
Wolverhampton MBC	C+		2	2	2	1	1	3	3	4	1	3	2	1	2	✓		B	F	E	19	27

See start of this appendix for explanation of contents of this table

English unitaries

Organisation	Site classification 2006	Improvement from 2005	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3	Currency	Links elsewhere	News value	E-mail response (days)	Services	Participation	Use of search	A to Z	Location	Navigation	Accessibility	Readability	Resilience (errors)	Resilience (availability)	Resilience (home page)	Scenarios and themes	'Yes' to questions
Bath & North East Somerset	C		2	1	2	1	1		1	5	0	0	2	1	1			B	B	C	14	23
Blackburn with Darwen BC	C+		1	1	1	1	2	3	1	4	2	1	2	0	2			B	D	E	15	30
Blackpool BC	C		2	1	1	0	1		1	4	0	1	1	1	1			E	B	D	12	21
Bournemouth BC	C+		2	2	2	1	2	3	N	8	1	1	2	2	2			C	F	D	19	39
Bracknell Forest	T		2	2	2	2	3	3	N	7	1	3	2	2	3		49.5	C	C	D	26	45
Brighton & Hove	T		2	3	3	2	3	3	8	9	2	2	3	3	3	✓	52.1	C	G	C	28	45
Bristol City	C+		2	2	2	0	2	3	4	5	0	2	3	1	2			C	C	C	18	31
Darlington BC	C+	✓	3	3	2	3	2	2	1	9	3	2	3	2	2			D	C	E	27	40
Derby City	T	✓	2	2	2	1	3	3	4	7	2	2	2	2	2		8.9	D	E	F	22	39
East Riding of Yorkshire	C+		1	2	2	1	2	3	2	8	1	1	1	1	1			C	B	C	14	35
Halton BC	C		1	1	1	1	1		5	2	1	0	1	1	2			D	F	E	11	16
Hartlepool BC	C		1	1	1	1	2		2	4	0	1	1	0	1			D	C	F	11	22
Herefordshire	C+	✓	2	2	2	1	2	3	2	5	2	1	1	1	1	✓		A	A	E	16	30
Isle of Wight	T	✓	3	2	2	2	3	3	16	9	2	3	3	1	1		8.7	B	C	C	26	39
Isles of Scilly	C+	✓	1	1	1	2	2	3	1	5	2	3	3	1	3	✓		B	C	E	21	29
Kingston upon Hull City	C+		2	1	1	0	2	3	2	5	1	1	2	1	1			C	B	C	14	27
Leicester City	T	✓	3	3	3	2	2	3	1	9	3	3	3	2	2		11.2	C	E	C	28	49
Luton BC	C+		3	2	2	2	1	3	16	6	1	2	2	1	2			B	B	E	21	33
Medway	T		2	0	1	2	2	3	6	4	1	2	2	2	3		52.2		I	F	21	27
Middlesbrough	C	✓	2	1	1	2	1		1	5	3	1	2	1	1			C	H	C	14	26
Milton Keynes	T	✓	3	2	2	2	3	3	N	8	2	3	3	3	2		68.7	A	B	B	27	41
North East Lincolnshire	C+		2	2	2	2	1	3	1	8	2	1	2	1	2			B	H	E	18	37
North Lincolnshire	T	✓	2	2	2	2	2	3	11	6	1	1	2	2	2		10.2	B	B	E	21	40
North Somerset	C		1	2	2	1	2		4	7	0	1	3	3	0			B	C	F	18	31
Nottingham City	C+		1	1	1	2	2	2	1	7	1	1	1	2	2	✓		C	B	D	18	28
Peterborough City	C+	✓	2	0	2	2	2	3	2	4	2	1	3	1	0			B	A	D	16	25
Plymouth City	C+		1	3	2	1	2	3	N	7	1	2	2	1	2			B	D	D	20	40
Poole, Borough of	T		3	2	1	2	2	3	1	8	4	2	2	2	3		63.0	C	H	E	23	45
Portsmouth City	C		1	1	1	0	1		N	2	0	2	2	1	2			A	C	D	14	25
Reading BC	C		1	1	2	1	2		1	4	0	0	1	1	1			B	E	C	12	24
Redcar & Cleveland	C+		1	2	1	2	2	3	N	4	2	1	2	1	2			C	C	C	17	27
Rutland CC	C+	✓	2	2	2	1	2	3	2	5	0	2	2	1	2			C	B	E	21	25
Slough BC	C		1	2	1	2	2		1	5	1	2	2	1	2	✓		B	A	D	18	28
South Gloucestershire	C+		1	2	3	1	2	3	N	11	1	2	2	0	0			B	F	D	16	33
Southampton City	C		3	1	2	1	1		2	6	1	0	1	2	1			D	F	E	15	37
Southend-on-Sea BC	C		1	1	1	0	1		1	4	1	1	2	1	2			B	C	E	14	21
Stockton-on-Tees BC	C+		1	2	1	2	2	3	1	8	3	2	2	1	3	✓		A	D	E	20	39
Stoke-on-Trent City	C		1	1	1	0	1		1	2	0	1	2	0	1			C	G	D	10	22
Swindon BC	C+		1	1	2	2	3	3	1	8	2	2	2	2	2			D	E	F	21	35
Telford & Wrekin	C		1	1	2	1	1		1	3	0	1	1	0	1			B	H	E	12	18
Thurrock BC	T		1	2	2	3	3	3	1	6	3	2	2	0	3	✓✓	53.1	A	C	D	22	35
Torbay	C+		2	1	2	1	3	1	1	8	2	1	1	1	2			C	B	F	19	41
Warrington BC	C+		2	2	3	1	2	3	1	5	0	1	2	1	3			C	B	C	20	37
West Berkshire	C		2	2	1	1	3		N	7	0	1	1	1	1			D	G	D	16	31
Windsor & Maidenhead, RB of	C		1	1	2	2	3		4	8	3	2	2	1	1			D	C	F	19	31

See start of this appendix for explanation of contents of this table

English unitaries

Organisation	Site classification 2006	Improvement from 2005	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3	Currency	Links elsewhere	News value	E-mail response (days)	Services	Participation	Use of search	A to Z	Location	Navigation	Accessibility	Readability	Resilience (errors)	Resilience (availability)	Resilience (home page)	Scenarios and themes	'Yes' to questions
Wokingham	C+		2	1	1	1	2	1	2	3	1	2	1	1	1				C	C	F	14	30
York, City of	C		3	2	2	1	1		2	5	1	2	2	1	2				C	C		20	28

Welsh unitaries

Organisation	Site classification 2006	Improvement from 2005	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3	Currency	Links elsewhere	News value	E-mail response (days)	Services	Participation	Use of search	A to Z	Location	Navigation	Accessibility	Readability	Resilience (errors)	Resilience (availability)	Resilience (home page)	Scenarios and themes	'Yes' to questions
Blaenau Gwent CBC	C		0	1	1	1	1		N	2	1	1	1	0	1			C	C	E	10	17
Bridgend CBC	C		1	1	1	2	1		N	4	1	2	2	0	1			C	C	B	14	22
Caerphilly CB	C+		2	1	2	1	1	3	4	4	0	2	1	1	0			C	A	C	15	27
Cardiff County	C		0	1	1	1	1		1	2	2	0	0	1	1			D	B	D	10	11
Carmarthenshire CC	C+		2	2	2	3	1	3	1	6	3	2	2	3	3		34.7	C	B	C	26	31
Ceredigion CC	C+		1	1	2	1	1	3	2	4	0	2	0	2	2			B	G	C	15	22
Conwy CBC	C		1	1	1	1	1	3	N	2	0	2	1	0	2			B	A	C	14	20
Denbighshire CC	C+		1	2	1	2	2	3	1	5	2	2	2	2	2			C	B	D	21	33
Flintshire CC	C+		1	1	2	2	1	3	N	3	0	0	2	0	2			C	B	C	16	19
Gwynedd CC	C+		1	2	1	2	2	3	9	2	0	3	3	1	3	✓		A	A	D	23	24
Isle of Anglesey CC	C		1	1	1	0	1		N	1	0	1	2	1	0			C	B	D	11	11
Merthyr Tydfil CBC	C		1	2	1	1	1		2	4	0	3	2	1	2			B	C	D	18	24
Monmouthshire CC	C+		0	2	3	2	2	2	N	6	0	1	0	2	2	✓		C	C	E	18	25
Neath Port Talbot CBC	C+		2	1	2	2	2	3	4	3	1	2	1	2	2			C	G	D	21	29
Newport CBC	C+	✓	2	1	2	2	1	3	1	1	1	1	2	0	2			C	F	E	17	24
Pembrokeshire CC	C+	✓	2	2	2	1	1	2	1	1	0	2	1	2	2			C	A	E	19	26
Powys CC	C+	✓	1	2	2	1	1	2	6	4	2	1	1	0	2			C	E	D	15	20
Rhondda, Cynon Taff CBC	C		1	1	2	1	1		3	2	0	1	1	0	1			C	C	E	13	15
Swansea, City & County	C+		1	1	1	2	3	3	N	3	0	2	2	0	2			D	C	E	19	21
Torfaen CBC	C		2	1	1	1	0		2	2	0	1	1	0	1			C	A	B	12	16
Vale of Glamorgan	C+		2	2	2	2	2	3	N	3	2	1	2	1	2			D	D	F	19	27
Wrexham CBC	T		1	2	2	2	3	3	3	7	1	2	3	3	3	✓	60.3	C	B		27	32

Scottish unitaries

Organisation	Site classification 2006	Improvement from 2005	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3	Currency	Links elsewhere	News value	E-mail response (days)	Services	Participation	Use of search	A to Z	Location	Navigation	Accessibility	Readability	Resilience (errors)	Resilience (availability)	Resilience (home page)	Scenarios and themes	'Yes' to questions
Aberdeen City	C		2	2	1	1	1		1	3	1	1	1	1	1			C	F	C	13	16
Aberdeenshire	C+	✓	1	1	2	2	3	3	1	6	2	2	3	1	3	✓		C	C	B	23	27
Angus	C		1	1	2	2	1		1	6	1	1	2	0	1			A	A	C	15	18
Argyll & Bute	C		1	1	1	1	1		1	0	0	1	2	0	1			B	F	D	12	13
Clackmannanshire	T	✓	2	2	3	2	3	3	N	7	2	2	2	2	2	✓✓	40.8	B	B	C	25	37
Dumfries & Galloway	C+	✓	1	2	1	1	1	3	2	5	1	1	1	0	1			C	C	E	13	20
Dundee City	C+		1	1	2	1	1	1	1	6	0	2	3	1	2			C	D	D	17	25
East Ayrshire	T		2	2	1	1	2	3	1	7	1	2	2	2	2		53.0	B	E	D	21	35
East Dunbartonshire	C+		2	1	1	1	2	3	1	5	1	2	2	2	1			D	B	F	18	27
East Lothian	C+		2	2	1	1	1	3	1	6	0	2	2	1	2			C	E	F	16	29
East Renfrewshire	C+		2	1	1	2	2	3	1	3	2	1	1	0	3			C	G	D	15	19
Edinburgh, The City of	C+		2	2	1	2	1	3	1	4	2	1	1	1	2			C	D	E	17	26
Falkirk	C		1	1	1	1	1		2	3	0	0	2	0	1			C	C	D	11	12
Fife	C+		1	2	2	3	2	3	2	6	2	2	2	1	3	✓		C	F	C	23	28
Glasgow, City of	C+		1	2	2	1	2	3	1	5	0	2	1	1	2		48.1	B	B	B	19	27
Highland	C		2	1	1	1	1		1	2	1	1	2	0	1			B	A	B	13	20
Inverclyde	C	✓	1	1	1	1	1		1	0	0	0	1	0	2			D	B	A	10	7
Midlothian	C		1	1	1	1	1		1	1	1	1	0	0	2			D	C	F	11	12
Moray	C		1	2	2	2	1	1	N	2	2	1	2	0	1			D	G	F	15	20
North Ayrshire	C+		1	2	1	3	2	3	1	3	2	1	2	2	2			E	F	E	20	23
North Lanarkshire	C+		1	2	1	1	3	3	1	3	0	2	1	2	2			C	B	B	20	20
Orkney Islands	C	✓	1	2	1	2	1		2	3	2	1	2	0	1			C	F	C	14	22
Perth & Kinross	C+	✓	2	2	1	2	3	1	2	5	1	2	3	0	2			D	B	B	22	28
Renfrewshire	C+		2	2	1	1	2	3	1	4	0	2	2	2	3				B	E	21	26
Scottish Borders	C+	✓	2	2	1	1	2	3	N	2	1	2	1	0	3			C	E	E	18	24
Shetland Islands	C		1	2	1	1	2		N	3	0	2	2	0	1			C	F	C	15	20
South Ayrshire	T	✓	2	2	2	1	2	3	1	6	1	2	2	3	2		56.3	B	B	D	23	34
South Lanarkshire	C+	✓	1	1	1	1	3	3	2	3	0	2	2	1	2			D	G	E	16	23
Stirling	C+		2	2	2	1	2	3	N	5	0	2	1	2	2	✓	41.8	D	H	F	21	32
West Dunbartonshire	C+	✓	1	2	1	1	1	3	1	2	2	2	2	1	1			C	C	E	16	19
West Lothian	C+		2	1	2	1	1	3	1	6	0	2	2	1	2		63.0	B	C	D	17	24
Western Isles	C		0	1	1	1	1		2	1	1	0	2	1	1			C	B	C	11	8

See start of this appendix for explanation of contents of this table

Northern Ireland districts

Organisation	Site classifiaction 2006	Improvement from 2005	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3	Currency	Links elsewhere	News value	E-mail response (days)	Services	Participation	Use of search	A to Z	Location	Navigation	Accessibility	Readability	Resilience (errors)	Resilience (availability)	Resilience (home page)	Scenarios and themes	'Yes' to questions
Antrim BC	C		0	1	1	2	1		1	1	1	1	0	0	2			C	C	E	12	8
Ards BC	C	✓	2	1	1	1	1		1	3	1	2	1	1	2	✓		B	G	C	15	17
Armagh City & DC	C	✓	0	0	0	1	1		1	0	1	1	1	0	0			B	B	E	7	10
Ballymena BC	C		0	2	1	0	1		2	3	0	0	0	0	0			B	C	E	7	19
Ballymoney BC	P		0	1	0	1	1		3	0	0	1	1	0	2			C	G	E	11	7
Banbridge DC	C	✓	0	2	0	2	1		N	2	1	1	2	0	2			D	G	D	14	15
Belfast City	C		0	1	2	2	1		1	3	2	1	0	1	2			C	B	C	14	16
Carrickfergus BC	C		0	1	0	2	2		1	3	2	2	2	1	2			C	C	E	16	14
Castlereagh BC	P		0	0	0	1	1		1	0	1	1	0	1	1			D	G	D	9	6
Coleraine BC	C		0	0	1	1	1	3	1	1	1	1	2	1	2			D	G	F	13	11
Cookstown DC	C		0	0	1	0	0		N	0	0	0	1	0	0			C	A	D	4	8
Craigavon BC	C		0	0	2	1	1		2	1	0	0	1	0	1			D	C	D	8	7
Derry City	C		0	0	1	0	1		7	0	0	1	1	0	1			C	D	D	9	7
Down DC	C	✓	0	1	1	1	2		5	2	0	2	3	0	1			C	F	C	15	14
Dungannon DC	C	✓	0	0	1	1	1		1	1	0	1	2	1	0			D	B	E	10	13
Fermanagh DC	C+		0	0	1	1	2	3	N	1	0	1	3	1	2			B	B	C	15	17
Larne BC	P		0	0	1	1	1		1	0	0	0	0	0	1			C	A	F	7	8
Limavady BC	P		0	0	1	0	1		N	0	0	1	2	0	2			C	E	D	10	11
Lisburn BC	C		0	0	0	1	0		N	0	1	1	2	1	1			B	G	D	10	11
Magherafelt DC	P	✓	0	0	0	1	0		1	0	0	1	0	0	1			B	H	E	4	6
Moyle DC	P		0	0	1	1	1		1	0	0	0	0	1	1			C	C	E	8	3
Newry and Mourne DC	C		0	0	1	1	1		1	1	1	1	0	1	1			D	A	D	10	10
Newtownabbey BC	C		0	2	1	1	1	3	N	1	0	2	2	1	2			D	H	F	16	15
North Down BC	C+		0	2	1	2	3	3	1	2	1	2	1	3	2	✓		C	D	E	20	22
Omagh DC	C		0	0	2	1	1		5	2	1	0	0	0	1			D	G	F	8	13
Strabane DC	C		0	0	0	0	0		1	0	0	1	0	0	1			B	C	D	5	6

See start of this appendix for explanation of contents of this table

2   Transactional websites

1   List of transactional sites in 2006

Organisation	Region	Type	Year
Barking & Dagenham	London	LB	2004
Basildon DC	East	SD	New
Birmingham City	W Mids	MD	2003
Bracknell Forest	S East	EU	2004
Brent	London	LB	2004
Brighton & Hove	S East	EU	2004
Bromley	London	LB	New
Burnley BC	N West	SD	New
Camden	London	LB	2002
Canterbury City	S East	SD	New
Chester City	N West	SD	2005
Clackmannanshire	Scotland	SA	New
Corporation of London	London	LB	2004
Cotswold DC	S West	SD	2005
Derby City	E Mids	EU	New
Derbyshire CC	E Mids	CC	New
Devon CC	S West	CC	2005
Dudley MBC	W Mids	MD	2005
Durham CC	N East	CC	2004
East Ayrshire	Scotland	SA	2005
East Sussex CC	S East	CC	New
Exeter City	S West	SD	2005
Havering	London	LB	New
Hertfordshire CC	East	CC	2002
Hillingdon	London	LB	2004
Isle of Wight	S East	EU	New
Kensington & Chelsea	London	LB	2004
Kirklees MBC	York/Humb	MD	2004
Lambeth	London	LB	New

Organisation	Region	Type	Year
Leicester City	E Mids	EU	New
Lewisham	London	LB	New
Lincolnshire CC	E Mids	CC	New
Liverpool City	N West	MD	2005
Maidstone BC	S East	SD	2003
Medway	S East	EU	2005
Milton Keynes	S East	EU	New
North Lincolnshire	York/Humb	EU	New
Borough of Poole	S West	EU	2004
Salford City	N West	MD	2005
Shrewsbury & Atcham BC	W Mids	SD	2005
Shropshire CC	W Mids	CC	New
South Ayrshire	Scotland	SA	New
South Tyneside MBC	N East	MD	2004
Southwark	London	LB	New
Stroud DC	S West	SD	2003
Surrey CC	S East	CC	2004
Surrey Heath BC	S East	SD	2005
Tameside MBC	N West	MD	2001
Tandridge DC	S East	SD	New
Thurrock BC	East	EU	2005
Tower Hamlets	London	LB	2005
Trafford MBC	N West	MD	New
Wandsworth	London	LB	2003
Warwick DC	W Mids	SD	New
Warwickshire CC	W Mids	CC	New
Wealden DC	S East	SD	2005
West Lancashire DC	N West	SD	New
West Oxfordshire DC	S East	SD	New
Westminster	London	LB	2002
Wrexham CBC	Wales	WA	2003

2   Sites not quite transactional

We explain in Section 3.2 the process for assessing whether or not a site is transactional according to our definition. Many sites came close to our benchmark. We have listed these below.

- Adur DC
- Allerdale BC
- Ashford BC
- Bristol City
- Carmarthenshire CC
- Chichester DC
- East Riding of Yorkshire
- Fife
- City of Glasgow
- Gloucestershire CC
- Leicestershire CC
- Mole Valley DC
- Norfolk CC
- Northamptonshire CC
- Plymouth City
- Salisbury BC
- South Oxfordshire DC
- Spelthorne BC
- Staffordshire Moorlands DC
- Stirling
- Stockton-on-Tees
- Taunton Deane BC
- Tonbridge & Malling BC
- West Lindsey DC
- West Lothian
- West Sussex CC
- Wiltshire CC
- Worcestershire CC
- Wychavon DC

3   List of qualifications found in transactional sites

Our reviewers have used the definition laid down in our original survey in 1999, when judging a site to be transactional (see section 4 of this appendix). In January 2004 we specified detailed criteria for transactional sites (see *Better connected: building for the future*). If all these criteria were applied strictly, then there would be fewer transactional sites. However, it is also important to retain the historical threshold that we have used in the previous six years of the survey. We have used the full criteria to qualify the transactional status.

The table opposite shows the qualifications that we have found about these sites during our evaluation process from all the other surveys outside our main survey. Only the main survey is used to inform the overall site ranking, but these additional sources provide a list of qualifications for transactional sites. We use these qualifications alongside other factors to select our Top 20 sites (see section 3.2).

Each council with a transactional site can use this table as a basis for its own service improvement plan.

Full list of possible qualifications

Ref	Qualification	Source	No of T sites	Sites tested
1	News value lacking on home page (all 5 questions answered)	Special survey	2	30*
2	No reply to sample e-mail within 1 day	Special survey	33	273
3	No evidence of discussion forums	Special survey	50	418
4	Inadequate results from test of search engine facilities	SciVisum	41	421
5	No (or incorrect) use of access keys	SiteMorse	49	412
6	Failure on Level A WAI accessibility	RNIB	50	412
7	Readability test below benchmark	Emphasis	45	58**
8	More than 10 technical errors (Band C, D or E)	SiteMorse	26	253
9	More than 1 service failure in 10 days	SiteMorse	41	317
10	Less than 3 out of 5 home page tests passed	SiteMorse	43	350

Chart 74 Summary of qualifications for transactional sites

Notes   *Only 304 sites tested (inc all T sites)
           **Only 73 sites tested (inc all T sites)

Qualification reference	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
Barking & Dagenham		Q	Q		Q	Q	Q		Q		6
Basildon DC		Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	9
Birmingham City		Q	Q		Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	8
Bracknell Forest		Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	9
Brent		Q	Q		Q	Q			Q	Q	6
Brighton & Hove		Q	Q		Q		Q	Q	Q		6
Bromley			Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	8
Burnley BC		Q	Q			Q	Q		Q	Q	6
Camden		Q	Q	Q		Q			Q	Q	6
Canterbury City			Q	Q	Q	Q		Q		Q	6
Chester City				Q	Q	Q		Q	Q		5
Clackmannanshire		Q	Q		Q		Q				4
Corporation of London		Q	Q		Q	Q	Q		Q	Q	7
Cotswold DC			Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	8
Derby City		Q	Q	Q	Q	Q		Q	Q	Q	8
Derbyshire CC			Q	Q	Q	Q	Q		Q		6
Devon CC		Q		Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	8
Dudley MBC			Q	Q	Q	Q	Q		Q		6
Durham CC	Q	Q	Q	Q		Q	Q	Q		Q	8
East Ayrshire			Q	Q	Q	Q	Q		Q	Q	7
East Sussex CC			Q		Q		Q	Q		Q	5
Exeter City			Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	Q		Q	7
Havering				Q	Q	Q	Q		Q		5
Hertfordshire CC				Q	Q	Q	Q		Q		5
Hillingdon		Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	Q				6
Isle of Wight		Q			Q	Q			Q		4
Kensington & Chelsea		Q	Q	Q	Q		Q				5
Kirklees MBC			Q		Q	Q	Q		Q		5
Lambeth			Q			Q	Q				3
Leicester City			Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	Q		7
Lewisham		Q	Q	Q	Q			Q	Q	Q	7
Lincolnshire CC			Q	Q	Q	Q	Q		Q	Q	7
Liverpool City		Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	Q			Q	7
Maidstone BC	Q		Q	Q	Q	Q		Q	Q	Q	8
Medway		Q	Q		Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	8
Milton Keynes		Q	Q		Q	Q					4
North Lincolnshire		Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	Q			Q	7
Poole, Borough of				Q	Q	Q		Q	Q	Q	6
Salford City		Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	Q		Q		7
Shrewsbury & Atcham BC				Q	Q	Q		Q		Q	5
Shropshire CC		Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	9
South Ayrshire			Q		Q	Q	Q			Q	5
South Tyneside MBC		Q	Q			Q	Q			Q	5
Southwark		Q		Q	Q	Q			Q	Q	6
Stroud DC		Q	4	Q	Q	Q	Q		Q	Q	7
Surrey CC			Q	Q		Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	7
Surrey Heath BC			Q			Q			Q		3
Tameside MBC					Q	Q				Q	3
Tandridge DC		Q	Q	Q	Q		Q	Q	Q	Q	8
Thurrock BC			Q	Q			Q		Q	Q	5
Tower Hamlets			Q	Q	Q		Q	Q	Q	Q	7
Trafford MBC			Q	Q	Q	Q	Q			Q	6
Wandsworth		Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	Q		Q	Q	8
Warwick DC		Q	Q				Q		Q	Q	5
Warwickshire CC		Q	Q	Q		Q	Q	Q		Q	8
Wealden DC			Q		Q	Q	Q	Q		Q	6
West Lancashire DC			Q	Q	Q	Q	Q		Q	Q	7
West Oxfordshire DC		Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	Q			Q	7
Westminster		Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	Q		Q	Q	8
Wrexham CBC		Q	Q	Q				Q		Q	5
Total	**2**	**33**	**50**	**41**	**49**	**50**	**45**	**26**	**41**	**43**	**380**

Chart 75 Detailed list of qualifications for transactional sites

4   Ranking system

Our main ranking uses a four-point classification to reflect the state of development.

We classify websites as:

P   is for **promotional** site. Such sites provide basic promotional information about the organisation with very little scope for interaction. They might typically concentrate on tourism, economic development and basic departmental information, with limited information on individual services beyond an A to Z list with telephone contact numbers. Little use will be made of e-mail or online feedback, although a few gateway links might be provided.

C   is for **content** site. Such sites provide useful content and encourage some interaction. They have more sophisticated promotional information (eg accommodation search, downloadable files) and include features such as What's New pages, A to Z lists of services and keyword site search facilities. They usually include some basic user interaction (eg clicking on an area map to find details of local councillors) and make use of e-mail and online feedback on home pages.

C+ is for **content plus** site. Such sites provide very useful content and offer some examples of more advanced online self-service features. They allow individual users to define their own search criteria (eg search by postcode for service information, refine searches of local tourist accommodation by type and price), may include links to services such as Girobank for online payment and online databases for items such as library catalogues, planning applications, committee minutes. Service information is comprehensive and makes widespread use of e-mail, online feedback and even discussion forums. Such sites also typically host information on behalf of the wider local community.

T   is for **transactional** site. Essential content and self-service values drive the whole of such sites and combine to offer a compelling user experience. Such sites demand attention for their accessibility, completeness, thoughtfulness and coherence. They have developed more than one type of online interaction (eg payment, applications, consultation, bookings) and also offer examples of customer recognition (eg ability to check outstanding council tax balance, renew library books). They also provide specific e-mail contacts for different service enquiries and make widespread use of databases, downloadable forms and online form filling (eg for service requests, appointments). They routinely utilise the potential of the Internet for joined-up government (eg OFSTED reports listed alongside schools listings, life event scenarios) and offer unique examples of the application of the medium in a local government context.

U   is for **unclassified** site, not available at the time of the review (eg major new version under development).

Readers must be clear in understanding that our assessment is based entirely on the evidence before our eyes. From this we assess the state of development of websites, not whether they are actually delivering benefits, or even being well used or efficiently managed. To do that would involve in-depth discussion with webmasters and others which goes beyond the scope of this survey.

3 Non-local authority websites

Introduction

Using a shorter questionnaire, based on the local authority survey, we have also investigated websites from some other organisations that subscribe to Socitm *Insight* as follows:

- Six passenger transport executives (PTEs)

- Eight fire services

- Eight police services

- Sixteen registered social landlords (RSLs)

- Twenty-six central government departments (including all those represented on the CIO Council)

- Three organisations in the National Health Service (NHS)

- Eight regional or other government organisations

The results are summarised here and detailed in the subscriber-only area of www.socitm.gov.uk.

In total, we surveyed an additional 75 sites from these related sectors.

From these 75 sites, we have identified three exceptionally good ones that are transactional to our definition:

- The HM Revenue and Customs (www.hmrc.gov.uk)

- The Ministry of Defence (www.mod.uk)

- Northumbria Police (www.northumbria.police.uk)

Passenger transport executives (PTEs)

The six sites surveyed comprise:

- Centro

- Greater Manchester

- Nexus Tyne & Wear

- South Yorkshire

- Strathclyde

- West Yorkshire PTE

Overview of results

On first sight, these organisations seem to be missing an opportunity to deliver online ticketing as well as journey planners and information about season tickets and concessions. However, it may be that this is not as simple as it might appear, given the number of organisations actually delivering the public transport services. At a minimum, however, it should be possible to renew concessionary passes, even where payment is required. In some areas it should also be possible to issue season tickets or at least their renewal, together with payment for them.

Journey planning is usually offered, often through a link to Traveline, which is perhaps the best service provider in that it offers comprehensive coverage of all lines.

None of the sites offered much in the way of information about real-time problems such as train or bus delays — perhaps there were no problems at the time of the reviews.

Fire services

The eight sites surveyed comprise:

- Avon Fire Brigade
- Cheshire Fire Brigade
- Cleveland Fire Brigade
- Dorset Fire Service
- Greater Manchester FCDA
- Hampshire Fire & Rescue
- London Fire & Emergency
- Merseyside FCDA

Overview

Most sites provide basic fire safety information for the public. Some provide really good pages for children. There is the potential to develop an interactive service online when visitors request fire safety inspections. There is also a need to develop interaction with the public when dealing with hoax calls. The one site actually replaying hoax calls could be copied by other fire service sites.

None of the fire services were recruiting permanent fire fighters at the time of the review but most took the opportunity to encourage people to apply to be retained fire fighters — this could be improved in some cases, but most recognised the use of the website to publicise campaigns and open days.

As the sites increase in content, most will need a better search facility, and perhaps an A to Z list of contents.

Police services

The eight sites surveyed comprise:

- City of London Police
- Cumbria Constabulary
- Devon & Cornwall Constabulary
- Durham Constabulary
- Fife Constabulary
- Humberside Police
- Northumbria Police
- Wiltshire Constabulary

Overview

The Northumbria site shows what can be done by a police service website. This organisation has clearly thought about how the website can be used to get the public to interact with the police in a positive way as well as to report problems. Most others have started to encourage the public to use the site to prevent and report crime and some have special sections for children. However there is some way to go to make this a real channel of communication.

As with the fire service, recruitment of officers seems to be by campaign, rather than on-going. There is also a national recruitment site.

There is an opportunity to make more use of maps in presenting information, and perhaps for reporting incidents.

Some quality control issues have resulted in out-of-date information.

Registered social landlords (RSLs)

The sixteen sites surveyed comprise:

- Affinity Group HA
- Charter Community Housing
- Circle 33 Housing Group
- The Community Housing Group
- Family HA
- Flagship Housing Group
- Harvest Housing Group
- Home Group HA
- Horizon Housing
- Hyde Group
- NI Housing Executive
- Oxford Citizens HA
- Prime Focus Regeneration Group
- Sovereign Housing Association
- Wakefield & District Housing
- Westlea HA

Overview

It is quite difficult for an independent reviewer to assess many of these sites as the organisations are often made up of a number of companies with their own websites. It has to be assumed that tenants and potential tenants/purchasers would know which site to access in order to find the information and services they need. Given that is the case on some sites, there is good functionality for repairs reporting, rent payments, house searches and housing list maintenance. Others sites have a long way to go before being useful in this way.

Few sites make much use of search or A to Z lists of searches. As content develops, these could be important.

Greater clarity over the purpose of each site, together with links to other related sites, would be helpful. Being clear about who is likely to visit each site is essential.

There is little information generally about the relationship between these organisations and the communities and councils that they serve. As a minimum standard, a link to housing departments and waiting lists should be provided.

Central government

The twenty-six sites surveyed comprise:

- BECTA
- Cabinet Office
- Communications Electronics Security Group
- Criminal Justice Information Technology
- Crown Prosecution Service
- Dept for Constitutional Affairs
- Dept for Culture, Media and Sport
- Dept for Education and Skills
- Dept for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
- Dept of Health
- Dept for International Development
- Dept for Trade and Industry
- Dept for Transport
- Dept of Work & Pensions
- English Partnerships
- Foreign and Commonwealth Office
- HM Revenue and Customs (formerly Inland Revenue)
- Home Office
- Legal Services Commission
- Ministry of Defence
- National Health Service
- Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
- Office of Government Commerce
- Prime Minister's Office
- Police Information Technology Organisation
- Security Services

Overview

It is very hard to generalise about these sites. They range from excellent to quite poor. The best of the sites (HM Revenue and Customs, Ministry of Defence and the Department of Education) have really thought about their customers — who will be using the website and what they will want from it. Some of the other sites do not appear to have a purpose and little apparent idea what visitors would want to see. Even where the website is essentially an internal one, there is room to consider what visitors will need.

By the standards of *Better connected* a few sites need a major overhaul, and some are intended to be providing advice on standards of excellence in government. In spite of the emphasis now on take-up for local government, not one of these sites provides any statistics on usage and performance — should they not be setting an example?

Several of these sites do encourage another visit — and surprising ones at that. They show what can be done to use the web to improve public perceptions of the government sector.

Another difficulty in comparing these sites is that some of them are 'parent' sites for a number of sub-sites or related ones, such as the Passport Service site and the Civil Service Jobs site — these individual sub-sites were not covered by this review. In most cases the interface with the public is through these service/function specific sites. This may have led to lower than justified ratings for the main site.

A number of the sites were very dry or very technical, and were much more to do with internal operations than with public-facing activities. Since this review focused on those public-facing services, those internal sites will be criticised even though they may serve their intended function very well. It is, however, important to remember that websites can be accessed by anyone, and it is therefore essential to make it clear who it is for from the home page of the site.

Overall, the two transactional sites show what can be done — the obvious public-facing HM Revenue and Customs, and the much less obvious Ministry of Defence.

National Health Service

The three sites surveyed comprise:

- Avon IM & T Consortium

- Homefirst Community Trust

- Middlesbrough PCT

Overview

None of these sites seemed to be directed at members of the public although they may hold information of interest. Again, it not too apparent what the purpose of some of these websites is.

Regional or other government organisations

The eight sites surveyed comprise:

- Douglas, Isle of Man

- Greater London Authority

- LG Data Unit (Wales)

- London Connects

- North West Development Agency

- Sports Council for Wales

- States of Jersey

- Yorkshire and Humber Assembly

Overview

It is difficult to summarise these diverse sites. In general, the Douglas, Isle of Man, and the States of Jersey sites provide a wide range of services across the public sector. Their main customers will be people with some familiarity about the places, but more consideration should be given to customers from elsewhere who may have reason to use the websites for information. There is more that could be offered in transactions on both of these sites, both for residents and for visitors. It is possible that these are available on other sub-sites, and, if so, better signposting is needed from the main sites.

The others in this group have little direct contact with the public, and therefore there is less scope for development of transactional sites. However, all should be clear about their focus and purpose. They ranged in this review from being very limited to doing the best with the functionality they can provide — and therefore useful.

4   Questionnaire for the main survey

Introduction

This appendix lists all the questions in our main survey in one place. Almost all the questions are shown section by section in relation to the analysis of the results.

The review team conducted three separate surveys to support the main survey, but these questions are not repeated here. The main body of the report lists these questions as follows:

News value   Section 4.6

E-mail   Section 4.8

Discussion forums   Section 4.9

The questionnaire

Scenario 1: Resident enquiring about new licensing regulations

Q1   Can I find out who to apply to for a licence to serve alcohol?

Q2   Can I find a copy of the council's licensing policy?

Q3   Can I view the licensing register online to find out about the licence of a nearby pub?

Q4   Is there guidance on how I might be able to comment on a proposed wine bar in my area?

Q5   Is there a form and guidance that I can download to apply for a personal licence? (or Scottish equivalent)

Q6   Can I make a complaint online about a licensed premise?

Q7   How well does the website deal with this scenario? (0 is no information, 1 is poor, 2 is satisfactory, 3 is very good)

Q8   What comments have you to make about what you have found?

Scenario 2: Family on the move and enquiring about schools information

Q9   Can I find a list of schools with links to school websites?

Q10   Are schools shown on a map?

Q11   Does a search for 'bullying' point to information for parents or guardians?

Q12   Does a search on 'school travel' lead to details of the arrangements for getting to school?

Q13   Can I find out about 'after-school' clubs?

Q14   Can I find information on educational arrangements for 'looked after children'?

Q15   Can I apply online for a school place?

Q16   Can I pay for school meals online?

Q17   How well does the website deal with this scenario? (0 is no information, 1 is poor, 2 is satisfactory, 3 is very good)

Q18   What comments have you to make about what you have found?

Scenario 3: Working parent looking for new job

Q19   Does the job vacancies home page present information (or links to other resources) that promotes working for the council?

Q20   Do the jobs pages link to information about local childcare for working parents?

Q21   Can I register to receive job vacancies of interest to me by e-mail?

Q22   Can I download a job application form?

Q23   Can I apply for a job using an online form?

Q24   Is there guidance with the application form on how they will handle the data collected eg privacy policy/data protection?

Q25   How well does the website deal with this scenario? (0 is no information, 1 is poor, 2 is satisfactory, 3 is very good)

Q26   What comments have you to make about what you have found?

Interactive applications

Q27   Can I reserve or renew a library book?

Q28   Can I request an appointment with a social worker online?

Q29   Can I request to receive my council tax bill electronically?

Q30   Does a search for 'pothole' lead to information about how to report one to the council (or tell you which authority is responsible for dealing with potholes)?

Q31 Can I report a pothole online?

Q32 Does a search on 'planning office' lead to contact details for the planning department?

Q33 Can I search the planning register online?

Q34 Can I submit a response to tender online?

Q35 Can I apply online to be considered for the council's approved list of suppliers?

Q36 How well does the website deal with interactive applications? (0 is none, 1 is poor, 2 is satisfactory, 3 is very good)

Q37 What comments have you to make about what you have found?

Currency

Q38 Can external organisations submit new or revised information online for the community database?

Q39 Can I access a personal web page for my local councillor?

Q40 Is there evidence that the website is used to conduct online consultations?

Q41 Can I see the results of any consultations?

Q42 How well does the website appear to be providing up-to-date information? (0 is very unsatisfactory, 1 is poor, 2 is satisfactory, 3 is very good)

Q43 What comments have you to make about what you have found?

Location and maps

Q44 Can I find my nearest library (county) or leisure centre (all others)?

Q45 Does the site locate car parks or public transport information on a map for visitors to the area?

Q46 Is there information about roadworks in the area and where they are located on a map?

Q47 County: Can I find out about highway orders in the area via a map?

All others: Can I find out about planning applications in the area via a map?

Q48 If the site uses interactive mapping, does it provide an explanation about what it does and a simple 'help guide' for the user on how to get the most use out of the map?

Q49 Are mapping tools easy to use?

Q50 Does the site inform users that, if they are using a dial-up internet connection, it may take sometime to download the maps?

Q51 Does the site tell you how to obtain information in GIS maps in an alternative format?

Q52 How well does the website deal with the use of location and maps? (0 is none, 1 is poor, 2 is satisfactory, 3 is very good)

Q53 What comments have you to make about what you have found?

Joining up

Q54 Does the site feature deep links to external sites?

Q55 Are external links explained before you click on them?

Q56 Does the information about benefits include links to DWP?

Q57 Can I see details of the Crime and Disorder Partnership?

Q58 Is there a link to Directgov on the home page?

Q59 How well does the website join up with other sites? (0 is very unsatisfactory, 1 is poor, 2 is satisfactory, 3 is very good)

Q60 What comments have you to make about what you have found?

A to Z list of services

Q61 Is the A to Z organised in a way that makes it easy to find entries?

Q62 Is the scope of the A to Z clearly explained?

Q63 How well does the A to Z list work? (0 is no A to Z list, 1 is poor, 2 is satisfactory, 3 is very good)

Q64 What comments have you to make about what you have found?

Search

Q65 Are the search results presented clearly and in a helpful manner (with good clues as to what lies behind each result)?

Q66 Does a search on 'emergency plan' lead you to finding such a plan?

Q67 Does a search on 'emergency plan' lead to a helpful message?

Q68 How well does the search engine perform? (0 is no search engine, 1 is poor, 2 is satisfactory, 3 is very good)

Q69 What comments have you to make about what you have found?

Accessibility

Q70 Do images have meaningful and useful ALT text?

Q71 Did you find any instances of colour being used as the only means of conveying specific information?

Q72 Are languages other than English (or Welsh or Gaelic) used in the site?

Q73 Did you find any data tables present in the site?

Q74 Is the site readable when style sheets are switched off?

Q75 Did you find any instances of content that flickered or caused the display to flicker?

Q76 Is a text/low graphics version of the site offered?

Q77 What comments have you to make about what you have found?

Resilience

Q78 Is there a link to the 'Get Safe Online' campaign website? (www.getsafeonline.org)

Q79 Can you find evidence of reassuring the user about security?

Q80 Did the site stay up right through the review?

Q81 Was the site available when you wanted to review it?

Q82 How fast is the site? (0 is not usable, 1 is poor, 2 is satisfactory, 3 is very good)

Q83 How resilient does the site appear to be? (0 is very unsatisfactory, 1 is poor, 2 is satisfactory, 3 is very good)

Q84 What comments have you to make about what you have found?

Web statistics

Q85 Can I find out recent visitor statistics for the site?

Q86 Can I find recent site availability statistics?

Q87 Give URL of page where statistics are found

Navigation

Q88 Do the most useful navigation features display on every page without the need to scroll down?

Q89 Does the site feature a text-based hierarchy or trail of indicator links?

Q90 Are clickable documents always identified (eg as pdf/Word), with file size given?

Q91 How usable did you find the site? (0 is not usable, 1 is poor, 2 is satisfactory, 3 is very good)

Q92 What comments have you to make about what you have found?

Conclusion

Q93 Whilst reviewing the site, did you come across any obviously out of date information?

Q94 What innovations and howlers did you find?

Q95 Was this a compelling user experience?

Q96 How do you rank the site overall? (P, C, C+, T or U)

Q97 What overall comments have you to make about the site?

5 Visitor feedback (Socitm *Insight* website take-up service, using Nielsen//NetRatings)

Introduction

We introduced a new service in 2004 that allows councils to find out what council website visitors think of the experience. Over 50 councils now subscribe to the service and 46 used it in December 2005. Section 6.4 presents the main results. Here we present the breakdown, council by council. An electronic version can be found in *How did your council do?*, the subscriber-only area of www.socitm.gov.uk.

Methodology

The information is collected through a short exit survey added to participating authorities' websites and launched (by a piece of code invisible to the user) as every tenth visitor leaves the site. The survey asks nine questions and takes around two minutes to complete. Supporting software collects the answers and analyses results in a variety of ways, allowing subscribers to look at findings from their own website and compare them with findings from the rest of the subscriber group.

What questions are asked?

Please note that these questions have been reviewed during 2005 and changed with effect from January 2006.

Q1   How did you find this site? (9 options)

Q2   Which of the following information were you looking for on the council website today? (34 options)

Q3a Did you find the information you were looking for?

Q3b If you had not come to the website for this information, how else would you have contacted the council? (5 options)

Q3c Were you satisfied with the clarity of the information presented?

Q3d If you were looking for similar information again, what is the likelihood of the website being your first port of call?

Q4a What year were you born?

Q4b Are you male or female?

Q5   Which of the following applies to you? (14 options)

The options used are shown in the detailed results that follow.

Volume of traffic

Our sample of 46 councils received 2,392,808 unique visitors in December 2005. The average figures per type of council are summarised in the chart below:

Type of council	Ave visitors
Shire county	57,000
Shire district	14,500
London borough	68,000
Metropolitan district	68,000
English unitary	30,000
Welsh unitary	20,000
Scottish unitary	17,000
NI district	2,000

Chart 76 Number of unique visitors (December 2005)

From this we can estimate that just over 10.6m people visited local authority websites across the UK in this month. This estimate takes into account that the websites from this sample are 15% better developed than the average council website, according to our ranking system. Accordingly, we reduce the gross estimate by 15% as we make the assumption that the better developed the site the more visitors it might attract.

Arrival at website

Q1   How did you find this site?
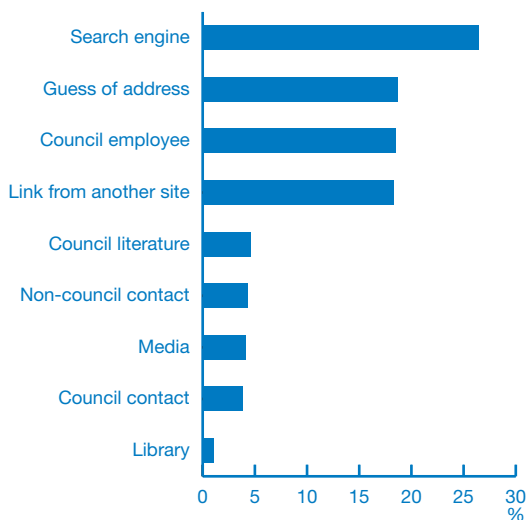
Chart 77 Methods of finding council websites

Reason for visit

Q2.   Which of the following information were you looking for on the council website today?

Reason	%
Job vacancies	17.9
Just browsing	10.7
Planning application	6.2
Policy/strategy documents	5.5
Schools information	4.0
Local/council news	3.8
Library information	3.0
Sport/leisure facilities	3.0
Family history/local history	2.3
Bin collection/recycling information	2.1
Housing	2.1
Contacting your council	1.8
Make a payment	1.8
Council committee meetings/documents	1.6
Local events	1.4
Council tax/budget	1.4
Travel information	1.2
Local organisations	1.2
Local attractions	1.1
Other	20.2

Chart 78 Reasons for visiting council websites

Visitor experience

Q3a Did you find the information you were looking for?
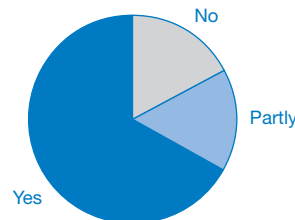
Chart 79 Percentage finding information (overall)

The percentage of those who have found the right information has increased by 3.3 percentage points from 63.6% to 66.9%. Similarly, the percentage of those that have not found the right information has reduced by 3.1 percentage points from 20.3% to 17.2%. These changes amount to an overall improvement of 5%.

Q3b If you had not come to the website for this information, how else would you have contacted the council? (5 options)
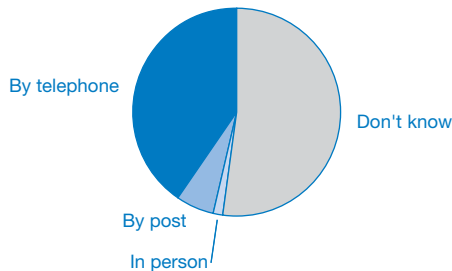
Chart 80 Alternative ways of contacting council

Q3c Were you satisfied with the clarity of the information presented?
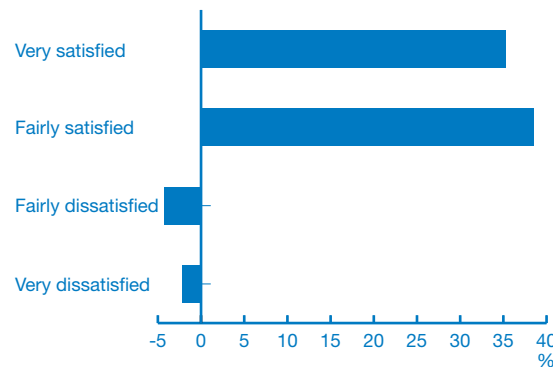
Chart 81 Satisfaction with clarity of information

This amounts to a net satisfaction rating of 67.30 (calculated by subtracting those dissatisfied from those satisfied), which compares with a rating a year earlier of 63.92 — an increase of just over 5% improvement.

Q3d If you were looking for similar information again, what is the likelihood of the website being your first port of call?
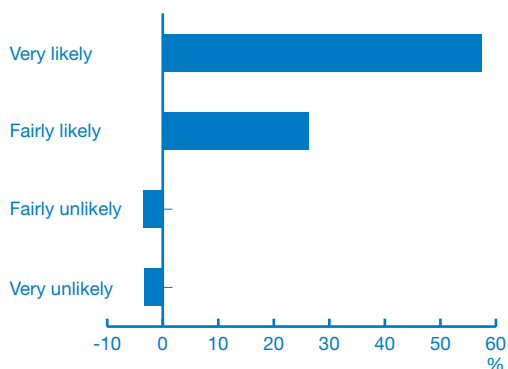
Chart 82 Likelihood of repeat visits

The net likelihood of a return visit is 76.91 (calculated by subtracting those unlikely to return from those likely to return). In December 2004 the equivalent figure was 74.66, leading to an increase of 3%.

Profile of visitor

Q4a What year were you born?
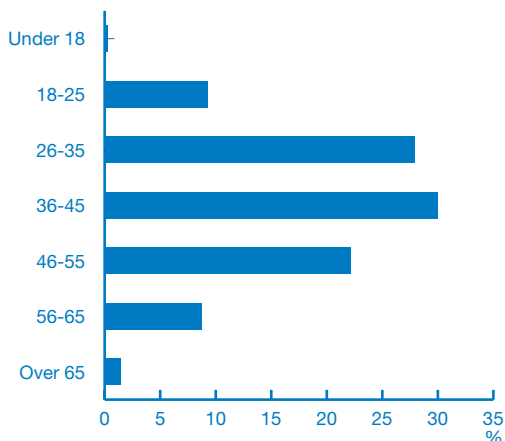
Chart 83 Age profile of visitors

This age profile differs slightly from the age profile shown last year in that the number of visitors under 25 has dropped from 15.0% to 9.6% and the number of those over 55 has increased from 9.1 % to 10.2%. The number between 26 and 55 has increased accordingly by 4.2%.

Q4b Are you male or female?
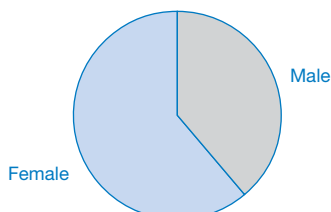
Chart 84 Gender profile of visitors

This chart shows in effect a shift of 4% more female visitors than male visitors over the previous 12 months.

Q8 What brings you to this local authority site?
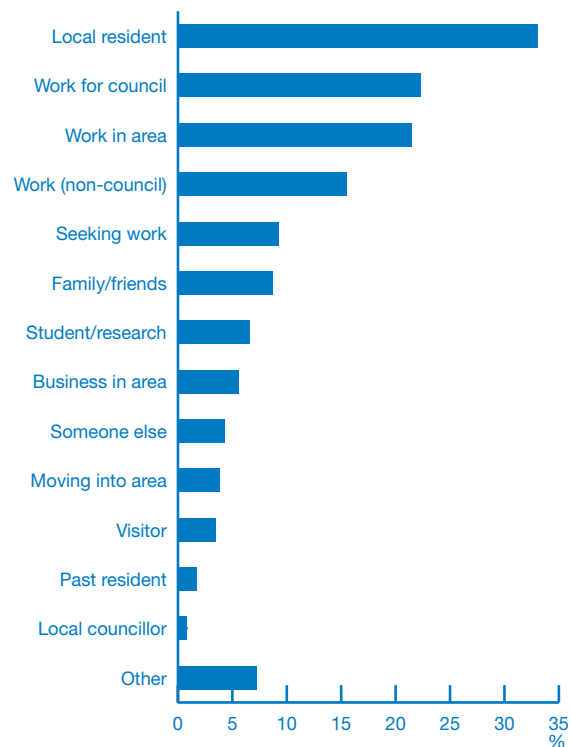
Chart 85 Profile of type of visitors

Note: Many visitors describe themselves as belonging to two or more types. Hence the column of percentages exceeds 100%.

Full list of options for types of visitor comprises (in the order presented to the respondent):

- I am a local resident
- I do business in this area
- I work in this area
- I work for the council
- I don't work for the council, but am accessing the site in connection with my job
- I am seeking work
- I am a local councillor
- I am accessing this site on behalf of someone
- I am planning to visit/I am visiting
- I am planning to move here
- I am studying/researching
- I used to live here
- I have family/friends in the area
- Other

Further information: See section 6.4 for main commentary

If subscriber, visit *How did your council do?*, the subscriber-only area of www.socitm.gov.uk for the supporting data

6   Joined-up working in county areas

1   Analysis of survey for evidence of joined-up working

This first part of the appendix sets out the full results of an analysis of joined-up working in county areas in three stages.

- Stage 1   State of each council website

- Stage 2   Evidence of joined-up working in each council website

- Stage 3   Evidence of county and district co-operation

The charts opposite are the full versions of extracts given in Section 8 which contain just the top ten counties.

Stage 1   The state of each council website

This table averages the scores of all councils in a county area, whether county, district or unitary. It analyses the state of each council website in terms of:

- The ratings for each theme (max of 3 for eleven themes, giving 33)

- The number of 'Yes' answers to each question (max 60)

- An index created by weighting these two items against a maximum of 50 each, to give an index of 100

Stage 2   Evidence of joined-up working in each council website

This table averages the scores of all councils in a county area, whether county, district or unitary. It analyses the response to appropriate aspects of the survey in terms of:

- The ratings for the theme of links everywhere in section 4.5 (max of 3)

- The number of 'Yes' answers to each question the same section (max 5)

- An index created by weighting these three items against a maximum of 50 points each respectively, to give an index of 100

Stage 3   Evidence of county and district co-operation

This table averages the scores of the county and districts in a county area, excluding any unitary. It analyses the responses by the county to two questions in the main survey related to district functions, and by each district to three questions related to county functions. The sum total of 'Yes' answers is averaged by the number of councils (ie county plus the number of districts).

Stage 1   The state of each council website

Organisation	'Yes' answers	Themes	Index
East Sussex	24.1	35.3	66.0
Surrey	23.0	35.8	64.6
Northumberland	19.2	30.3	54.3
Dorset	19.7	33.9	58.0
Buckinghamshire	20.7	30.0	56.3
Leicestershire	19.9	30.5	55.6
Wiltshire	19.3	30.5	54.7
Lancashire	16.1	21.5	42.3
Gloucestershire	20.0	28.9	54.4
Derbyshire	18.3	30.8	53.4
Devon	16.9	33.2	53.3
Warwickshire	19.8	27.5	53.0
Oxfordshire	19.7	27.5	52.7
West Sussex	18.0	30.1	52.4
Kent	19.3	26.5	51.3
Lincolnshire	19.0	27.0	51.3
Suffolk	19.0	26.9	51.2
Shropshire	17.3	26.6	48.3
Durham	17.7	25.8	48.2
Cornwall	18.0	24.1	47.4
Staffordshire	16.3	27.0	47.2
Norfolk	17.3	25.1	47.1
Somerset	16.3	26.7	47.0
Hertfordshire	18.8	20.9	45.9
Cumbria	17.0	23.9	45.6
North Yorkshire	15.1	26.0	44.6
Nottinghamshire	14.9	26.2	44.4
Bedfordshire	15.2	25.4	44.2
Northamptonshire	16.0	23.9	44.1
Hereford & Worcestershire	15.1	25.3	44.0
Essex	15.4	24.6	43.8
Hampshire	14.5	25.5	43.1
Cambridgeshire	14.3	23.9	41.5
Cheshire	13.8	23.0	40.0

Chart 86 State of websites by county area

Stage 2 Evidence of joined-up working in each council website

Organisation	'Yes' answers	Themes	Index
East Sussex	49	50	99
Surrey	43	46	89
Dorset	48	41	89
Wiltshire	45	39	84
Lincolnshire	41	42	83
Northamptonshire	45	38	83
Somerset	42	39	81
Norfolk	45	35	80
Oxfordshire	38	42	80
Devon	45	35	79
Kent	41	37	78
Cornwall	40	38	78
Buckinghamshire	38	39	77
Suffolk	42	35	77
Warwickshire	37	39	76
Suffolk	38	38	75
Cumbria	36	38	74
Lancashire	42	31	73
Hertfordshire	34	38	72
Leicestershire	38	33	71
West Sussex	38	33	71
Nottinghamshire	41	30	71
Gloucestershire	37	33	70
Durham	37	33	70
North Yorkshire	39	28	67
Staffordshire	33	30	63
Essex	32	30	62
Shropshire	33	29	61
Cheshire	33	28	61
Hereford & Worcestershire	33	27	60
Cambridgeshire	31	26	58
Northumberland	29	29	57
Hampshire	31	24	56
Bedfordshire	28	20	48

Chart 87 Joined-up working by county area

Stage 3 Evidence of county and district co-operation

Organisation	'Yes' answers	Themes	Index
Dorset	28	64	92
Surrey	31	58	90
East Sussex	21	68	89
Wiltshire	25	58	83
Essex	25	57	82
Devon	25	55	80
Bedfordshire	20	55	75
Derbyshire	23	53	75
Norfolk	22	53	75
Durham	25	47	72
Nottinghamshire	28	44	72
Suffolk	25	47	72
Warwickshire	17	54	71
Leicestershire	25	45	70
West Sussex	22	47	69
Gloucestershire	25	43	68
Northumberland	18	50	68
Buckinghamshire	29	38	67
Hereford & Worcestershire	22	44	66
Lincolnshire	28	38	66
Lancashire	27	38	65
Staffordshire	20	45	65
Cumbria	18	46	64
Shropshire	21	43	64
North Yorkshire	25	39	64
Hampshire	25	38	63
Somerset	17	46	63
Hertfordshire	16	43	59
Oxfordshire	21	38	58
Cheshire	19	33	53
Kent	20	32	52
Cambridgeshire	18	29	46
Cornwall	16	28	44
Northamptonshire	13	31	44

Chart 88 County and district co-operation

2 Reviewer impressions of joined-up working

This second part of the appendix backs up the objective analysis of results from the main survey with a more impressionistic account from reviewers who, being allocated whole county areas to cover, could each build up a good impression of how well joined-up each area felt.

Key: Portal 'Yes' indicates further details in Appendix 7

Note: Indicates more information in section 2.4 of this appendix

2.1 Shire county areas (two-tier working)

	County area	Do all sites in one area cross-link with each other?	Portal	Note below
1	Bedfordshire	Districts link to the county and the county to each district but the unitary (Luton) stands apart. Bedfordshire is not well joined-up as an area. Districts are not fully exploiting the county site and there is little sense of added value for the user.		
2	Buckinghamshire	Yes, to varying degrees. All have some links, but only a few have good deep links.	Yes	Note 1
3	Cambridgeshire	No. Some did, but not all.		Note 2
4	Cheshire	No, but the county does link into the districts and for the most part, the districts link to the county site.		Note 3
5	Cornwall	Yes.		
6	Cumbria	Yes.		
7	Derbyshire	Yes via partnership initiatives.		Note 4
8	Devon	Yes, for particular purposes.	Yes	
9	Dorset	Dorset for You covers four of the councils plus some of a fifth, but not the unitary (Poole).	Yes	
10	Durham	To a greater or lesser degree. The county and its districts feel like a cohesive area but the unitary (Darlington) is definitely apart from this grouping.		Note 5
11	East Sussex	Yes, they appear to link well through a regional A to Z. I gained the impression that there had been a vast amount of cooperation across the region to provide information about each others services.		
12	Essex	Not all the websites did.	Yes	Note 6
13	Gloucestershire	No — joining up is successful from the districts to the county and vice versa but not much evidence seen of links with between the neighbouring districts.	Yes	Note 7
14	Hampshire	A number of the district websites linked to the county's services, such as roadworks. The county did deep link to its districts for the services that they provide where part of this survey (eg licensing).	Yes	
15	Herefordshire and Worcestershire	Yes but some only through a link on the home page. The unitary (Herefordshire) does not appear to take account of the other councils.	Yes	
16	Hertfordshire	Not all. Some make use of each others information. It seems likely that some districts are working together — they have the same style A to Z, and used the same Public Access Planning system.		
17	Kent	No. Generally the districts are very good at linking to the county, but the county is not so good at linking back out to the districts. Some sites are good at linking to neighbouring authorities sites and others do not do this at all.	Yes	
18	Lancashire	Some of them link to their neighbours although only one spotted with prominent links.		Note 8
19	Leicestershire	Mostly done, if at all, through the search and A to Z option for 'search all Leics'.	Yes	Note 9
20	Lincolnshire	Yes. Most of the districts and the county appeared to be joining up very effectively through their A to Zs.	Yes	Note 10
21	Norfolk	Mixed. Some of the districts linked to the county but some did not very well. No deep links into the districts found from the county, only to their home pages.		Note 11
22	North Yorkshire	They all attempt to, but most of the districts had not recognised that the county had redeveloped its site and, therefore, there were many broken links.		Note 12

	County area	Do all sites in one area cross-link with each other?	Portal	Note below
23	Northamptonshire	None of the districts link particularly effectively to the county, with many of the services provided by the county either unlisted or poorly listed (or linked) from the district. None of the districts take advantage of fabulous mapping facilities on the county website. Unfortunately, the county is not much better at linking to the districts.	Yes	
24	Northumberland	The districts do link to the county (some better than others) but the county did not deep link to districts well. In a number of instances they pointed to 'Northumberland Online'.	Yes	
25	Nottinghamshire	This is quite variable. Rushcliffe lacked deep links to the county site, but linked to 'Notts.info'. Most districts did reasonably well, but some were definitely better than others. The county had deep links into all the districts.	Yes	
26	Oxfordshire	Yes. The websites in this area are very advanced.	Yes	Note 13
27	Shropshire	A long way from being a joined-up region, not least because the components are in such poor shape.		
28	Somerset	No. The county does not generally link into the districts.		Note 14
29	Staffordshire	No.		
30	Suffolk	Generally, the districts link well to the county and vice versa. This is done through A to Z entries, links in context and a link to the portal 'OneSuffolk' generally via an icon on the home page.		Note 15
31	Surrey	There was evidence of much excellent cross-linking across Surrey. Most districts were deep linking to the county within their A to Zs and also referring users to the County Portal, SurreyOnline.info, either within their A to Z or the search routine. There was evidence of the portal being referred to within context in individual articles.		
32	Warwickshire	The county joined up with districts very well. Most of the districts seemed to recognise the county's services. Not much evidence of joining up across districts		
33	West Sussex	The county was better at this than the districts. The county site had a good A to Z listing of local council services to show who was responsible for what, but this was not linked. There was some evidence of deep links from the districts to the county, but this was patchy and there could have been much more effective use from most of the districts. Most had deep links to the library services, but few linked effectively to highways, for example.		
34	Wiltshire	Good linking between county and districts for an area without an apparent joining-up project. No links from/to the unitary (Swindon).		

2.2   Shire county areas (unitaries only)

	All unitaries	Do all sites in one area cross-link with each other?
1	Avon	I did not discover any consistent degree of joining up across the area.
2	Berkshire	No.
3	Cleveland	No — only 1 out of 4.
4	Humberside	No. No sense of Humberside as a region from these unitaries.

2.3   Metropolitan areas

	Metropolitan areas	Do all sites in one area cross-link with each other?	Portals
1	Greater Manchester	No.	Yes
2	Merseyside	No, but some do.	
3	South Yorkshire	No.	
4	Tyne & Wear	I did not find much evidence of the sites linking up.	
5	West Midlands	The sites largely deal with their own area. There seems to be little consideration of services across the whole region.	
6	West Yorkshire	No, they do not link to each other.	

2.4   More detailed comments about selected county areas

	County area	Any other comments?
1	Buckinghamshire	MKWeb is the best example of a public-private portal that actually works that I know of. It is a genuinely strong council site within a commercial local portal.
2	Cambridgeshire	There were some efforts to join up these areas, which is a good start, but I think there could be a greater degree of joining up eg linking to the schools main page is great, but the link from the district site generally led me to believe that I was getting a list of schools only for me to find that I was looking at doing some more navigation. It was also unclear in most cases that schools are handled at a county and not a district level and hence, many users may be unsure as to why they have been referred to an alternative site.
3	Cheshire	It does seem that the same search and CMS system is being used by the councils in this area. This is supported by the search engine offering a focused search for the given council or a wider search. Many of the authorities had a very similar look and feel and this is a good demonstration of how working together can bring good benefits to the councils involved. It is a shame that the search facility was not working very well across the region.
4	Derbyshire	There were two very good initiatives, which I think worked better than the separate county portals that have been set up. There is a shared mapping facility with layers of different information such as car parks, schools, libraries etc, and a shared A to Z (and possibly search in some cases). They were implemented to different degrees in each district, but where this was done properly, it made an enormous difference to the site. The secret was a shared initiative and shared information but the information was integrated into the particular site.
5	Devon	The combined search seems a good idea, but does not necessarily work very well in practice. The biggest problem is the volume of results produced and the order in which they appear. It is essential to be able to be selective, and not all districts do this. The combined A to Z works very well, but does not necessarily work with some content management systems used. Most Devon sites use the same planning application software — perhaps this could also be usefully combined.
6	Essex	Some districts joined up better than others, the county was quite poor at linking to the districts. The districts were very good at joining up with the county's school section, there were a couple of exceptions, eg Harlow DC and Uttlesford DC. They deep linked to the section of the schools information that related directly to the schools in the district area. Another area where the districts were deep linking to the county was for the highways/roadworks information. One district I found said that Essex CC managed highways but did not link through to it. Tendring DC was the only district I could find in this area that deep linked to social services information.
7	Gloucestershire	County-wide shared A to Z list is problematic on some sites but works well on others. All the Gloucestershire sites share an A to Z and search facility that is embedded into each website. This means that the same A to Z entries appear across all the websites. Theoretically, this seems like a good idea, but there were varying degrees of success.
8	Lancashire	Large number of councils – 15 (county plus 2 unitaries and 12 districts) 1 No sign of a regional portal 2 Some of the districts appeared to have the same content management system. 3 Some of them link to their neighbours although only one spotted with prominent links. 4 Most of the districts do link to the county — but one or two do not link well at all. One district had particularly good links to the county, which provided a seamless journey for the visitor. 5. No evidence of vertical portals being used either — except for the Planning portal. Some linked to different procurement sites in the region.
9	Leicestershire	There seem to have been lots of 'portal' type initiatives in Leicestershire. But there does not appear to be any consideration of overlap, or a consistent, across the county use of these sites. But maybe they are not up to date/not worth it!
10	Lincolnshire	Although the search facility on LincUp appeared to be very slow when I was reviewing it, it appears to be a very well thought out and extensive portal. Therefore, the individual council A to Zs and search engines ought to be promoting it, particularly when the search returns no items. At the moment, I would imagine that many users leave the site blissfully unaware of the portal and the service it offers.
11	Norfolk	The districts and county appear to use the same search application from Open Objects, yet it is implemented with varying degrees of success. This is to do with the titling of documents and pages in some cases and so reflects the web management of the individual sites as well as the application, and also how it has been configured. There was a very good consultation finder but not all the councils linked to it — why not? There was also a recruitment site, but it was indifferently used by some of the participants. I felt that they were not very well joined up in Norfolk.

	County area	Any other comments?
12	North Yorkshire	This area shows what can happen when there is insufficient communication between the web teams in the county and districts. All but one of the districts had many broken links to the county site because the county had implemented a new content management system within the past month. Two things should have prevented all these broken links. Firstly, a link checker program should be run frequently on every site. Ideally it should happen nightly, but even a weekly check would have picked up the problem before I reviewed these sites. Secondly, when any council re-launches its site, if the deep URLs change, then it ought to give notice to all its partners that are likely to carry deep links into its site.
13	Oxfordshire	Cherwell and Oxford City have a unified A to Z which links up to the County. This is a great idea - the only issue with this A to Z is that it is too complex. It does not have a flat structure, but instead lists different terms under each entry. There are also repetitions in the terms. Vale of White Horse has a variation on the unified A to Z and displays terms as either countywide or district. It also operates a two tier list ie if I click on a term and then get a sub menu which I think works better than putting them all in one long list. In any case, the councils of Oxfordshire have given much thought on how to link up and are taking practical steps towards achieving this goal. The districts link to the county in all areas you would expect, eg libraries, schools and road works.
14	Somerset	There is a site called 'Somerset Online' — all of the councils feature a link to it. Somerset Online appears to have a search function that pulls in content from, or searches across all, partner websites. The results are 'hit and miss'. In the case of Sedgemoor DC, I think it believed that Somerset Online removed the need for it to create links to county services, in which case Somerset Online should have been much more prominent and featured, with an explanation, right in the middle of the search page and anywhere else people might be looking for services.
15	Suffolk	They all seemed to be making an effort to link up. I think this could have been more effective if they added the link to OneSuffolk and the county council to their A to Z pages and possibly their search page.
16	Surrey	I got the impression, rightly or wrongly, that there was a lot of cooperation within Surrey to provide seamless services. There were very few broken links between council sites and the A to Zs were well populated. I was pleased to see the user being referred to the SurreyOnline portal within A to Zs and search engines, as opposed to just a link on the home page.

7   Examples of county-based portals

Introduction

This appendix analyses in brief a number of county-based portals that have been identified by the review team as team members have reviewed individual council websites. The list of such portals may not be definitive in the sense that no attempt has been made to find all that might exist. These are the portals that have caught the eye of the reviewers as they have been prominently displayed on the pages of the council websites.

The analysis here is only intended to give a flavour of the scope of the portal and the experience in using it.

The portals listed here comprise:

Cornwall	www.cornishkey.com
Cumbria	www.connectedcumbria.info
Devon	www.devonline.gov.uk
Dorset	www.dorsetforyou.com
Essex	www.essexonline.gov.uk
(Herefordshire &) Worcestershire	www.whub.org.uk
Gloucestershire	www.councildirect.info
Greater Manchester	Several portals
Kent	www.kentconnects.com
Lincolnshire	www.lincup.net
London	www.yourlondon.gov.uk
Northamptonshire	www.connect2northamptonshire.com
Northumberland	www.northumberlandonline.gov.uk
Nottinghamshire	www.notts.info
Oxfordshire	www.oxfordshiregateway.co.uk
Suffolk	www.onesuffolk.co.uk
Surrey	Several portals

Cornwall   www.cornishkey.com

The Cornish Key portal purports to carry news and service information for all Cornish districts. However, although the home page of the site has logos for all Cornish district councils as partners, they do not all seem to be providing service information to the portal. For example, if you search on 'council tax' for 'all of Cornwall', you only find information for Caradon DC and North Cornwall DC.

It also carries some generic information such as tourism information, mainly through external links, in this case to the Cornish Tourist Board.

The interactive mapping portal area is quite powerful. You can either put layers of information on to a map, or search by postcode or name. It is wide-ranging and allows you to search for a great deal of different kinds of information by map, although in some sub-sections such as leisure many of the options are greyed out and not yet available.

Cumbria   www.connectedcumbria.info

This is a portal partnership project of all the districts in the area plus the county and one or two other bodies like the North West e-Government Group (NWeGG). It claims to have various elements including common procurement of content management systems, content sharing/syndication through use of common standards and a common e-forms system. However, it is not clear at what stage these various elements have developed.

You can use the site to find a service across all local council websites, and search across all the sites. A test of a few of the deep links into the district sites did not work that well. It is hard to test the service properly, though, without interviewing the partners to see what is intended and at what stage the project has arrived.

Devon   www.devonline.gov.uk

This Devon portal, offers access to a wide range of information and services from the local authorities of Devon. From here you can access information directly from the county, unitary and district councils, Devon & Cornwall Constabulary, Devon Fire & Rescue Service and Dartmoor National Park. You can also find community information provided by a small pilot of Devon town and parish councils.

This seems to offer some information across boundaries, but possibly this is still under development. Most districts provide a link into it and offer it as an extra source of information.

It is not clear on any of the council sites quite why one would go to the portal site. It tends to be offered on the home page without explanation, and as an extra source of information from searches.

Dorset   www.dorsetforyou.com

This website has replaced the websites of Dorset CC and the districts of Christchurch, East Dorset and West Dorset. North Dorset DC links into it in places, but seems not to be a full partner. The partnership site works on the basis of providing general information across all services from both tiers, together with links to specific information for services where one council has responsibility. For example, licensing information is provided for all districts, but each one has also its own sections for its policies and transactions. Occasionally this is causing difficulties with keeping both sections up to date.The council-specific information for two of the councils is current for licensing but the general information is not.

The information is a bit patchy in places across councils — not all provide everything.

The site lacks good mapping functionality. Some is provided for planning applications but it was not working properly when tested (one is warned about this on the site).

The overall design and navigation works well most of the time, but occasionally one gets a little lost. For example, when looking at a specific council's information, one can return to general information without realising it. Hopefully, in practice this will not matter, but it was confusing when trying to evaluate the site for a particular council!

The introduction to the partnership is provided when one tries to access a council's old 'url', and for two of the three districts one can read the introductory pages and then click to 'Dorset for You'. The other district does this automatically and I could not read fast enough before the page changed! The introductory pages include North Dorset DC as a partner, although this is clearly not the case yet.

The North Dorset DC website links back to 'Dorset for You' in a few places, but does not directly reference the partnership. 'Dorset for You' includes North Dorset DC, also, in a few places as a partner. The design of 'Dorset for You' differentiates in its links between partners and non-partner Dorset district councils.

There is work to do on the A to Z list of services to ensure that it is comprehensive across all partners. It works well but does not include everything.

The search is a problem, not because it does not work, but because it covers such a large resource that it produces huge numbers of results. It is essential to make it more selective and to make sure it works properly with phrases. The Worcestershire Hub search, for example, provides for selection by council as well as allowing for 'all words, any word, and exact phrase' options. This is needed here, too.

A key to a successful partnership is, I think, giving the impression that the services are joined up, not just the website! In the case of 'Dorset for You' it does appear that some services are indeed joined up. For example, the job applications system is common, as is the planning applications system (even if it is not working yet). As this is quite difficult to achieve without confusing the user, the narrative needs to take account of the need to explain how things work, without assuming prior knowledge. The website has to recognise that users might have reached a point in www.dorsetforyou.com which requires them to know which council they have to deal with for that particular issue, even though they did not know when they started!

Essex   www.essexonline.gov.uk

Essex Online is a partnership of organisations across Essex including local district and unitary councils, the county council, the Essex Strategic Health Authority, Essex Police, Essex County Fire Services, other service providers, community and voluntary groups who make their information available through Essex Online and retaining responsibility for the information.

It also includes information from a range of national information providers including www.nhs.uk, NHS Direct, LearnDirect, Citizens Advice Bureaux, Department of Work and Pensions and Age Concern.

It is part of the 'seamlessUK' system which provides the search functionality and a growing network of local portals.

This website has an A to Z of services that covers all the partners and is reasonably comprehensive. When you select a topic, it returns matches that send you to the websites of partner authorities about the information that you receive. However, when one looks for council tax information, one would expect the districts to feature further up the list than they were as the top few results pointed to the police or the county council. When the search results are further refined, one notices the option to search the A to Z for a specific area of Essex only. If the search was refined to just Castlepoint BC to improve the search, the same top results came back. Not one of the results in the Top 10 listings take the visitor to the Castlepoint website. An explanation of the A to Z would help the visitor to understand how to use this facility properly.

Interestingly, the website was working towards developing online payment facilities with the first such service being the payments of car parking fines. As the website did deep link to the authorities that currently have payment facilities, it seems that the joint payments service for Essex Online will be the one to which all councils will eventually link.

Gloucestershire   www.councildirect.info

This is a council services and frequently asked questions (FAQ) website for the county of Gloucestershire. It consists of three web pages:

- An A to Z list, a list of most popular FAQs and a keyword search

- A page for registering on the site

- A page with an online form for sending in questions that invite a phone or e-mail answer

All had links from the home page but there was no explanation of what the site was. As the website name does not have the word 'Gloucester' in it, visitors may give up first. Some observations about its use by individual councils:

- Gloucestershire CC had a big link to the site and information about the site's purpose on the home page.

- Stroud DC's website promotes the site by including a link to it in its search page.

- Tewkesbury BC and Gloucester City had alternative text for the 'councildirect' logo that explained what the site is for.

- Cheltenham BC, Cotswold DC and Forest of Dean DC do not seem to be promoting the site beyond putting a logo and link to the site right at the bottom of their home page. There seems to be no further evidence of any other promotion of the site.

Greater Manchester   Several

There is a wealth of sub-regional partnerships that exist within the Greater Manchester areas. For the most part, these are focussed and not joined across the different authorities. They include

- Community information site:
  www.mymanchester.net/

- Online services for East Manchester:
  www.eastserve.com/opencms/opencms/

- Manchester partnership:
  www.manchesterpartnership.org.uk/

- Rochdale online: www.rochdaleonline.co.uk/

- Benefits Checker:
  www.gmep.org.uk/ccm/content/gmbenefits
  /webbencalc/

These sites tend to have no link back to the local authorities and are not always accessible. It is also often unclear as to what information is available and how to get the most out of these sites. The sites offer information on all aspects of life on the area, from working to living and have some really good features.

One exception to this is the Greater Manchester portal (GMeP) which is available on at least two of the Greater Manchester (GM) sites: www.gmep.org.uk/ccm/portal/. It is also noticeable that many of the GM sites seem to have the same system and approach for job searching on many of the Manchester sites. What a shame that they do not join them up for the whole area!

(Herefordshire &) Worcestershire

www.whub.org.uk

The Worcestershire Hub replaces Worcestershire CC site. It appears to be a partnership between the county and two districts at the current time. One district is fully integrated (Wychavon); the other (Malvern Hills) uses some of its facilities.

It is clearly intended to provide a cross-tier service, and the search engine for the participating councils searches all sites, with the option of narrowing this down. However, this is not working very well yet, and it has not yet been resolved how to keep the number of results to a manageable level, and in a useful sequence. An apparent search of the county site led to pages of results from Wychavon!

Kent

www.kentconnects.com

The portal aims to provide access to all services across the whole of Kent. There are links to the fire service, local BBC news, the Kent NHS website, a safety body called 'Secure Kent', a property database and an A to Z of council services.

The portal has a big image on the home page showing a street scene with buildings representing the different services (eg town hall for local services, chemist shop for the NHS etc).

The user searches for services by entering a keyword and then clicking an area on a map of Kent. The search results link into the web pages of the council for the area that one has clicked on. The search results tend to be jumbled up. For example, a search for licensing in Tunbridge Wells produces a page of results from Tunbridge Wells BC, Kent CC and the police website all mixed up together.

Users can also search for a service by clicking on an A to Z list, but the list did not contain the word 'Licensing' or similar term.

There is an area on the portal that lists more options for searching than is listed on the home page including business tendering opportunities. The business pages of the local authority websites, however, do not appear to point to this page.

Eleven out of 14 Kent council websites have links to this portal from their home pages, but notably the county site does not have a link from the home page. Other points that need attention include the lack of description of the function of the portal and the logo often being hidden in a clutter of logos on home pages.

The portal might be of more use to people who do not know the areas of Kent well and want to find out about services in an area where they do not know the name of the local authority. For example, you may want to know about beach huts in Margate but not know which council deals with that service.

Lincolnshire

www.lincup.net

This portal connects the websites and electronic services delivered by all seven of the district councils in Lincolnshire, the county council, the police and the health services. It provides access to public services. This looks well populated and very useful.

All the local authorities had the LincUp icon on the home page, but often one had to scroll down to it and it was mixed up with other icons on accessibility and Directgov.

The portal could have been very effective to some of the district councils who were not deep linking very well, particularly if they had included it in their A to Z pages.

London

www.yourlondon.gov.uk

Most London boroughs (but not all, such as Croydon) provide a link to the 'Your London' community portal website at www.yourlondon.gov.uk.

'Your London' describes itself as 'the definitive starting point for access to all London public and community services' and that by joining together London's public services all those living, working, studying or investing will benefit from vastly improved access to London information and services, regardless of borough boundaries.

The London e-government partnership, London Connects, is responsible for developing the portal, which is jointly funded by the boroughs, GLA and ODPM. The website states clearly that the portal is still very much in development, with further releases of content planned over the coming months.

Most of the London boroughs promote the availability of the portal, though the visibility of the website varies widely, and none of the councils actively encourage their web visitors to access the portal. Instead, for the most part, there was a logo for the portal on the home page of the councils' websites. Westminster City's huge logo on its home page was the most noticeable.

There appears to be no further integration towards portal content on any council's website, ie by encouraging the user to click through to access facilities that may be available there.

What is striking is that the portal appears to be well thought out and of genuine, if currently limited, use or benefit to the citizen. The opportunity for community groups to publish and maintain their own website using straightforward publishing tools is of real value, but none of the boroughs seemed to be promoting this facility, or apparently taking an opportunity to integrate 'Your London' more effectively with their own website content.

As usual with site registration facilities on local authority websites there is an opportunity to register but no explanation for the user as to why one should register, or the benefits that would come from doing so. This is such a missed opportunity and so simple to fix. Why should I register on the site if I don't know how that registration will ultimately benefit my user experience?

The site's search engine works reasonably well, but far from perfectly. This is an important point if the purpose of the portal is ultimately to drive traffic to the individual borough's website in order to access council services.

The basic personalisation opportunity for entering your location postcode so that your local borough was given precedence in search results was a neat touch. Once one has initiated the basic personalisation, the results of any search will drive the visitor to the local council's website to find the relevant answer.

Unfortunately, the search results do not always work according to plan. If you search for 'school travel' (as in the 2006 questionnaire we have used) and select 'local services' as the search criteria, the results page displays possibly related information available on 'Your London' but no results at all for the council (Westminster City Council being the example search. Try the same search on the city council's website and school travel plans appear as the first result!

This would seem to indicate that the search engine is not 'spidering' Westminster's website correctly, and ultimately if people depend on 'Your London' to provide information about school travel in Westminster, they will draw a blank.

Overall, the borough personalisation works satisfactorily but further development might beneficially gear the page content more specifically towards individual boroughs.

Overall, 'Your London' is impressive. Its design is crisp, engaging and encourages one to explore. It has some useful facilities that boroughs would benefit from linking to (eg 'find your nearest...' though its scope is somewhat limited right now).

Northamptonshire

www.connect2northamptonshire.com

This portal is a collaborative project by the eight councils. It says that its aim is 'to bring together a diverse range of information and services in a single place on the internet.' It is intended to help local organisations to create and maintain their own personal websites, known as 'communities', within the larger portal website. The service is free for 'not-for- profit' organisations, and provides easy to use content publishing resources.

In addition to the facility for community websites, the site provides good links into each council's website, and there is a central facility for 'apply, pay or report', with each specific page providing deep links to the relevant council's online service where available. A nice touch is that the service description for each council makes it clear whether the service can be requested online at present, or if alternative arrangements are applicable.

Each council promotes the availability of the portal, although the visibility of the facility varies widely, and none of the councils actively encourage their web visitors to access the portal. Instead, for the most part, there are links to the portal on the home page of the councils' websites or from what they consider to be relevant sections of their sites. Daventry is the one exception to this. I found the link to the portal but it was well hidden, apart from a launch press release dated 2004 found when I searched for 'connect2'.

The portal appears to be well thought out and of genuine use and benefit to the citizen. The opportunity for community groups to publish and maintain their own 'community' using straightforward publishing tools is of real value, but perhaps all councils are missing an opportunity to integrate the portal more effectively with their own website content.

There is no clear indication as to which council is the lead authority, although one imagines that it is the county council. In any event, the county is missing an opportunity to make its own website appear more joined up with districts and others. The portal itself joins up well. Why does not the county promote the functions offered and provide deep links to it?

Northumberland

www.northumberlandonline.gov.uk

Some of the councils linked to this portal which is a large, searchable A to Z of services. It describes itself as 'The Northumberland Online partnership comprises the six district councils of Northumberland and the county council. The partnership's objective is to improve access to local government services. This website provides a directory of the partners' services, each linked to the information page on the partner's own website. It offers a variety of ways of finding the service you require including searches, an A to Z and a service map.'

Three of the six councils had obvious links to the portal from their home page — Alnwick DC, Berwick-upon-Tweed BC (here used as the council's own A to Z list) and Northumberland CC.

This A to Z is developed so that visitors can then select the service they want in the A to Z, or, alternatively, they can choose the council and drill down to the service they are looking for.

At the outset the structure seemed consistent across all the authorities. If, however, one starts to drill down to the information, eg searching for 'council tax', it does not take visitors to the information on the authority's website, but keeps directing them further down to specific information about council tax such as appeals, backdating and overpayments. At this stage the content also becomes inconsistent. For example, one of the councils had four 'Revenues' titles under 'council tax', all taking the visitor to different information. On some occasions not all the districts were listed, eg for parking information only three out of six were listed. It has a very comprehensive A to Z and becomes the next port of call if one cannot use an individual council's A to Z.

The 'Service map by organisation' is not very easy to use, the categories at the top level being consistent but then varying deeper into the listings. On some occasions, it takes some time to drill down to get to a link that might usefully take the visitor to a council website. On one occasion our reviewer chose to go to 'Visitor Centre' information specifically having drilled down past 'Countryside', to be taken to the 'Countryside' page of the council's website to then select 'Visitor centre' information for a third time.

Overall, this is a good concept but needs some reviewing of how some links and content have been added to this portal.

Nottinghamshire

www.notts.info

This portal describes itself as '...your official guide to services in Nottinghamshire'. It has an A to Z based on the APLAWS category lists, plus a search that includes all of the councils in the area, and frequently asked questions. There seem to be quite a number of FAQs.

Only three out of nine councils seem to point to it, though, Broxtowe BC (small icon on home page), Mansfield BC (small icon) and Rushcliffe BC (large icon).

Oxfordshire

www.oxfordshiregateway.co.uk

You can report things and also add community information throughout the whole of Oxfordshire. This is a real asset for the residents of Oxfordshire and all the councils in the area link to it. It describes itself in the following way:

This site allows you to find information about Oxfordshire's public services and community groups. It covers local councils, the police and the NHS as well as clubs and societies and local facilities like post offices and leisure centres. If you set your location the site will find search matches in your area. You can change your location at any time and you can also do a quick search across the whole county.

If you have spotted a problem in your local area, why not Report It? You can tell us about issues such as potholes, abandoned vehicles, litter, anti-social behaviour and lights not working. Add your community group to our database for free, or search for clubs, societies and community facilities.

Suffolk

www.onesuffolk.co.uk

This is a portal for county-wide information, news, road and traffic updates and community websites. Clubs and organisations can add their information to a community database. It also provides a 'Report a problem' system which most councils were using. However, this needs to include more categories of problems, including one for 'Other'

It would have been good to see the search and the A to Z pointing to the information on the portal and also to see more links in context, but overall it seems useful.

Surrey   Several portals

Surrey Online (www.surreyonline.info) covers the services of the local authorities and other public bodies. It is well populated. For district services it seemed to work better from the joint A to Z than from the search facility.

Surrey Alert (www.surreyalert.info/surreyalertpublic /main/publichome) is dedicated to providing vital information in the case of an emergency. (The home page has a flickering 'ticker tape' banner).

Surrey Local Jobs (www.surreylocaljobs.co.uk) is a portal for local jobs across private and public sector. Not all councils linked to this.

Surrey Public Sector jobs (www.surreyjobs.info) is a portal for local authority jobs across the Surrey councils. All councils linked to this.

Youth portal (www.urcountyursay.net) looks like a portal to engage young people in debating issues within the county. Not all the councils seemed to link to this.

People over 50 (www.surrey50plus.org.uk) is a portal dedicated to people over 50, with cross-agency information and community information. Not all councils link to it.

8   Readability testing (Emphasis Training)

Introduction

We have commissioned assessments of the readability of 73 websites from a company that specialises in this work (Emphasis Training Ltd). This company has developed an assessment system that takes account of level of detail, layout, clarity and style, structure and accuracy (spelling etc), but on this occasion we only requested the company to perform automated testing rather than the full assessment, which has additional professional input.

The automated testing analyses factors of language such as:

- sentences per paragraph (target 2 to 4 sentences)

- words per sentence (target 10 words)

- characters per word, ie length of word (target 4 to 5)

- use of passive sentences (target 10%).

It also calculates two indicators, ie the Flesch Reading Ease score and the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level (used in USA).

The sites selected are all the transactional sites in 2006 plus a selection of other well-developed sites (ie C+ sites), making 73 in all.

Further information: **See section 5.8 for summary of survey See www.writing-skills.com that includes a knowledge bank of fact sheets on clear web content and many other aspects of good writing.**

If subscriber, visit *How did your council do?*, the subscriber-only area of www.socitm.gov.uk to see the detailed results of the survey for all of the local authorities assessed.

Readability scores explained

When Word finishes checking spelling and grammar, it can display information about the reading level of the document — its Flesch Reading Ease and Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level scores.

Here is a little more about what they mean.

Flesch Reading Ease score
This rates text on a 100-point scale: the higher the score, the easier it is to understand the document. For most standard documents, aim for a score of about 60-70. Word calculates them from algorithms devised by Rudolf Flesch in 1949 (so much for Plain English being a new idea!). The algorithms provide an index of words per sentence and number of syllables per 100 words.

How to calculate it
1 Take a sample of about 200 words

2 Calculate the average number of words per sentence [a]

3 Work out the number of syllables per 100 words [b]

4 Use the following formula:

Flesch Reading Ease = $206.835 - (1.015a + 0.846b)$

Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level
This rates text on a US grade-school level. For example, a score of 8.0 means an eighth grader could understand the document. For most standard documents, aim for a score of about 7.0-8.0.

Fog Index
Readers may also have heard of the Fog Index, which is another measure of readability and, like the Flesch Reading Ease Score, is also calculated from the number of sentences and the number of syllables per word. Clear writing has a Fog Index of between 2 and 3. Again, see the box below if you want to know how to calculate it.

How to calculate it
1 Take a sample of about 200 words

2 Count the number of sentences [c]

3 Count the number of words with 3 or more syllables [d], excluding proper names (eg Birmingham, David)

Fog Index = d/c

Rob Ashton, Emphasis Training Ltd

9   Search engine facilities (SciVisum)

Introduction

This appendix describes the methodology and tests used in an investigation into the state of search engine facilities in local government carried out during January 2006 by SciVisum Ltd. This is a web application testing specialist organisation, with wide experience of testing websites from a user perspective, to provide a common language between the technical and business teams of evidence-based performance metrics.

SciVisum has developed a unique in-house test engine, which measures user experience at each page step of pre-defined user journeys, showing delivery times and error rates that form the basis for key performance indicators for website management. A typical organisation will have a number of important user journeys where the real services offered by the site are taken up by visitors. For a council these might be simple journeys such as reporting an abandoned vehicle via a one-page form, through to making payments online, searching planning databases or looking at mapping-based information.

This testing of search engines is an example of part of such a user journey. The tests comprised:

● Availability of search engines (Test 1)

● Handling of 'two word' searches (Test 2)

● Handling of common words (Test 3)

● Resilience with non-character searches (Test 4)

● Delivery of high speed results (Test 5)

● Results per page (Test 6)

Test 1   Availability of search engines
The first step was to check that search engines exist.

Search engines	Sites in 2004	Sites in 2006
Not found	64	6
Found but not working	23	8
Found and working	381	454
Total	**468**	**468**

Chart 89 Availability of search engines

This shows a substantial improvement in the past two years.

The reasons for search engines being broken ranged from servers being slow to respond, with so many timeouts that testing was impractical through to strange problems such as cases where any search made would return no matches.

Test 2   Handling of 'two word' searches
To be effective, a search engine has to provide the kind of search options that are useful and familiar to the user. Using Google as the most used benchmark, the Scivisum team tested the ability to match exact phrases, not just words. For example, 'council tax' should find pages where **both** those words are present; in other words, a smaller number of matches should be presented to the user than if they typed the words 'council' or 'tax' separately.

Some sites had advanced search functions that did offer choices: 'any word' or 'all words' or 'exact phrase'. However, for this test only the 'simple searches' were used, using the search option presented on the site home page or linked from it.

The results were that 227 sites (50% of those with search engines) passed the test correctly. For 33 sites (7%) it was hard to determine how they behaved; some sites, for example, returned very small numbers of matches for 'council' anyway, or had small numbers of matches for most searches. Others limited their reporting so that, if a large number of matches were found, the site would report only up to a stated maximum value; for example, some sites would state: 'Pages 1 to 10 of 500' whether or not 'any word', 'all words' or 'exact phrase' were entered.

The site's default behaviour should match Google in order to maximise the user's ability to understand their search results quickly. For example, where home pages gave users the choice of search options, as above, they should be presented with default searches that mirror Google. Giving users choices in this situation without leaving defaults is unhelpful. Choices are useful if users need to move away from 'normal' options, but the 'normal' (ie Google-like) search should not require the user to think about and to change search options.

Test 3　Handling of common words

A query containing common words ('and', 'a', 'this', etc) can be more focused if those common words are removed. Google does this nicely and explicitly by stating which common words it has ignored.

Not only does this help the user, but it also reduces the load on the search engine, as searches are less onerous when fewer words are included. Indeed, for searches for a single common word, there is no need to return a list of matches at all, and with a properly configured search function there is no need even to query the database at all. Finally, allowing searches on common words can contribute to wide variation in the performance of a search engine.

The test performed here concerned the use of queries for a single word only, ie 'and' and 'a'. In the testing, 198 sites (44% of those with search engines) ignored both common words, and scored top marks in this test. Another 37 sites (8%) ignored only one of the two common words tested.

Unfortunately, in attempting to match and remove such common words, many sites quite had clearly broken their search engine in that searching for just a common word would present the user with an error page. It looks as if many sites have used the default searching facilities available from within Microsoft's IIS and Index Server, but have used some of the default 'noise word' options without care, and so caused errors. (Microsoft calls common words 'noise words' in its documentation.)

Credit goes to those very few sites that prevent searches for strings of less than three characters. This is also a good way to reduce load on the search database for those searches that are, in any case, unlikely to produce what a user requires.

Test 4　Resilience with non-character searches

It is important for users to be confident that a website is providing reliable information or else they very quickly give up. Furthermore, it is important that a user does not get the impression that the site is fundamentally broken. A search engine should not produce error messages, with technically bewildering content, that would scare users or even make them feel guilty that somehow they have themselves damaged the system! A well-engineered search engine will never throw a confusing error back to the user (even if one should occur internally), and certainly not one that is filled with technical 'gobbledegook'.

The testing on this point tried a number of simple search query profiles, including common punctuation characters. These can be easily typed by a user with a finger slip, or perhaps having copied in a search string from another document, and inadvertently copied extra characters in at the same time.

In order to pass this test, a site must never return an error message, but must also avoid returning a list of pages that matched the punctuation character. In other words, the search engine should not treat it as a search request.

On this test 233 sites (51% of those with search engines) passed fully, down from 281 in 2004.

Those that fail this test have inadequately engineered search engines. Not only are users intimidated by daunting error messages, but it is also likely that every such query is loading the server more than a usual query would. Testers noticed that some failing queries took many times longer to return than a usual query. A site with such a search engine is likely to have a more unpredictable load level, and is even potentially vulnerable to denial of service attacks.

101 sites (22%) did not respond with an error but did respond with a list of search results for some of the punctuation characters tried. In some cases it was possible to have what appeared to be every page on the server listed in the response, ('Pages 1 to 10 of 55,430...'). For those sites that returned all hits on a single page (not 10 at a time like Google), they returned pages as large as 3.12Mb, which represents ten minutes of modem download time (60 seconds for broadband users)!

In short, sites failing on this test have been inadequately engineered and tested, and this can be corrected at no cost other than an hour or two's effort.

Test 5   Delivery of high speed results

For a search engine to be useful to users, it must provide high speed results. The speed of delivery of search results was tested, comprising tests on:

- light

- lighting

- light* (wider search)

- council

- tax

- council tax

- plus the various punctuation character tests.

The results are summarised below:

Quality threshold	Definition	No of sites achieving this
High	All pages returned within 5 seconds	317
Medium	All returned within 10 seconds	80
Low	Some pages took longer than 10 seconds	57

Chart 90 Delivery of high speed results

Many sites, too numerous to list, returned results on all searches within a second, which is an admirable performance.

Test 6   Results displayed per page

The test investigated the number of results allowed per page. A minority of sites allow the user to select how many results per page should be displayed (as with the Google advanced search), but most are fixed at, or default to, 10 results per page. This is considered the optimal for this test, but, more leniently, top score was given to those that showed between 6 and 10 matches per page.

Quality threshold	Definition	No of sites achieving this
High	Up to 10 results per page	325
Medium	From 11 to 25 results per page	73
Low	Over 25 results per page	56

Chart 91 Results displayed per page

The worst sites delivered all the search results on a single page, resulting in pages that were in some cases as large as 3Mbyte, which would take over a minute to transmit for a broadband user. This causes an unnecessary load on the database servers and web servers, and network bandwidth. It is also extremely annoying to the user. In 2004, 76 sites offered unlimited results per page; by this year this had reduced to 42 sites, an improvement certainly, but still some way to go before the practice disappears.

10 Accessibility testing (RNIB)

Introduction

This appendix defines the methodology for carrying out the accessibility testing of all local authority websites. In addition, it contains some advice from the RNIB on the tricky issue of making geographical information systems (GIS) more accessible.

The priority outcomes policy states that the 'good' outcome for accessibility for all councils in England is to achieve by 1 April 2006 Level AA comformance of the Website Accessibility Initiative (WAI) standards. As very few councils have reached this level, our survey this year has focused on assessing Level A conformance, although we have tested for Level AA those that have reached Level A conformance. This appendix concentrates on the checkpoints for Level A.

Following the recommendation of the RNIB, we have adopted a three-stage process in order to reduce the specialist input required to a minimum.

Stage 1   Questions that could be answered by an automated benchmarking tool

Stage 2   Questions that could be answered as part of the main review by the Socitm Insight team (non-technical test)

Stage 3   Assuming sites passed Stage 1 and 2, further questions that can only be answered by RNIB's specialist consultants

In total there are 17 checkpoints in Level A of the guidelines. Most of the checkpoints are covered by at least two of the testing stages.

The types of error shown at each stage are listed below:

Stage 1   Automated testing
The site will fail this stage of the testing:

- if more than 5% of images (IMG element) found in the sample lack an ALT attribute

- if more than 5% of image map hotspots (AREA element) found in the sample lack ALT text

- if any Java Applets (APPLET element) lack both an ALT attribute and alternative content

- if any FRAMESET pages lack a NOFRAMES element

- if any FRAME elements lack a TITLE attribute.

Stage 2   Manual testing (non-technical)
The site will fail this stage of the testing:

- if the person checking the site has difficulty understanding the site or navigating when images are replaced by their ALT text

- if any instances are found of colour being used as the only way of conveying information

- if pages become difficult to understand or use when support for CSS is removed.

- if any flickering content is found.

Stage 3   Manual testing (technical)
The site will fail this stage of the testing:

- if the ALT text for image map 'hotspots' is not meaningful or appropriate

- if the ALT text and/or alternative content provided for Java Applets is not meaningful or appropriate

- if no appropriate alternative is provided for Flash or other embedded, non-HTML content

- if the NOFRAMES content provided as an alternative to frames is not meaningful or appropriate

- if no appropriate alternative is provided for content displayed in inline frames

- if multimedia files are used, but no appropriate alternative content (including audio description and/or captions where necessary) is provided

- if changes from one language to another (eg Welsh content on a page which is otherwise in English) are not coded correctly using the LANG attribute

- if no appropriate alternative is provided for dynamic content (ie content which is updated 'on the fly' from a server-side database without requiring the page itself to be updated)

- if no text links are provided in addition to a server-side image map

- if data table headings are not coded appropriately.

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines

These guidelines are dated 5 May 1999 as Version 1. There are three levels of conformance with this guideline:

- Conformance Level A: all Priority 1 checkpoints are satisfied

- Conformance Level AA: all Priority 1 and 2 checkpoints are satisfied

- Conformance Level AAA: all Priority 1, 2, and 3 checkpoints are satisfied

Priorities

Each checkpoint has a priority level assigned by the Working Group based on the checkpoint's impact on accessibility.

[Priority 1]

A web content developer must satisfy this checkpoint. Otherwise, one or more groups will find it impossible to access information in the document. Satisfying this checkpoint is a basic requirement for some groups to be able to use web documents.

[Priority 2]

A web content developer should satisfy this checkpoint. Otherwise, one or more groups will find it difficult to access information in the document. Satisfying this checkpoint will remove significant barriers to accessing web documents.

[Priority 3]

A web content developer may address this checkpoint. Otherwise, one or more groups will find it somewhat difficult to access information in the document. Satisfying this checkpoint will improve access to web documents.

The rest of this appendix summarises the guidelines (covering Priorities 1 to 3) and the checkpoints (covering Priority 1 only). This material is an extract from a much longer document of the key points about the guidelines and the levels of conformance (for further information see www.w3.org/TR/WCAG10/).

Web content accessibility guidelines

Guideline	Priority	Checkpoints for		
		1	2	3
1 **Provide equivalent alternatives to auditory and visual content** Provide content that, when presented to the user, conveys essentially the same function or purpose as auditory or visual content.		4	0	1
2 **Don't rely on colour alone** Ensure that text and graphics are understandable when viewed without colour.		1	1	(1)
3 **Use markup and style sheets and do so properly** Mark up documents with the proper structural elements. Control presentation with style sheets rather than with presentation elements and attributes.		0	7	0
4 **Clarify natural language usage** Use markup that facilitates pronunciation or interpretation of abbreviated or foreign text.		1	0	2
5 **Create tables that transform gracefully** Ensure that tables have necessary markup to be transformed by accessible browsers and other user agents.		2	2	2
6 **Ensure that pages featuring new technologies transform gracefully** Ensure that pages are accessible even when newer technologies are not supported or are turned off.		3	2	0
7 **Ensure user control of time-sensitive content changes** Ensure that moving, blinking, scrolling, or auto-updating objects or pages may be paused or stopped.		3	4	0
8 **Ensure direct accessibility of embedded user interfaces** Ensure that the user interface follows principles of accessible design: device-independent access to functionality, keyboard operability, self-voicing, etc.		1	0	0
9 **Design for device-independence** Use features that enable activation of page elements via a variety of input devices.		1	2	2
10 **Use interim solutions** Use interim accessibility solutions so that assistive technologies and older browsers will operate correctly.		0	2	3
11 **Use W3C technologies and guidelines** Use W3C technologies (according to specification) and follow accessibility guidelines. Where it is not possible to use a W3C technology, or doing so results in material that does not transform gracefully, provide an alternative version of the content that is accessible.		0	2	1
12 **Provide context and orientation information** Provide context and orientation information to help users understand complex pages or elements.		1	3	0
13 **Provide clear navigation mechanisms** Provide clear and consistent navigation mechanisms — orientation information, navigation bars, a site map, etc — to increase the likelihood that a person will find what they are looking for at a site.		0	4	6
14 **Ensure that documents are clear and simple** Ensure that documents are clear and simple so they may be more easily understood.		1	0	2
Total		**18**	**29**	**19**

Priority 1 checkpoints

No.	Details	Automated checks (Stage 1)	Socitm checks (Stage 2)	RNIB checks (Stage 3)
In general (Priority 1)				
1.1	Provide a text equivalent for every non-text element (eg via ALT, LONGDESC, or in element content). This includes: images, graphical representations of text (including symbols), image map regions, animations (eg animated GIFs), applets and programmatic objects, ascii art, frames, scripts, images used as list bullets, spacers, graphical buttons, sounds (played with or without user interaction), stand-alone audio files, audio tracks of video, and video.	Presence and location of, and provision of ALT attribute for: * images * image map hotspots * applets * embedded objects * audio and video files Presence and location of, and provision of NOFRAMES content for frames. Presence and location of, and provision of alternative content for inline frames (IFRAME).	Appropriateness of ALT text for images (Q48 of survey)	Appropriateness of alternatives for: * applets * embedded objects * audio and video files Appropriateness of NOFRAMES content for frames.
2.1	Ensure that all information conveyed with colour is also available without colour, for example from context or markup.	N/a	Presence and location of colour being used as the sole means of conveying information. (Q49 of survey)	N/a
4.1	Clearly identify changes in the natural language of a document's text and any text equivalents (eg captions).	N/a	Presence and location of use of languages other than English. (Q50 of survey)	Changes in language correctly coded.
6.1	Organise documents so they may be read without style sheets. For example, when an HTML document is rendered without associated style sheets, it must still be possible to read the document.	Presence and location of style sheets and CSS formatting	Robustness of site in functioning and remaining legible when CSS support removed. (Q52 of survey)	N/a
6.2	Ensure that equivalents for dynamic content are updated when the dynamic content changes.	Presence and location of APPLETs, OBJECTs, EMBED elements and SCRIPTs.	N/a	Presence and location of dynamic content and appropriateness of alternatives
7.1	Until user agents allow users to control flickering, avoid causing the screen to flicker.	N/a	Presence and location of flickering content. (Q53 of survey)	N/a
14.1	Use the clearest and simplest language appropriate for a site's content.	N/a	N/a	N/a
And if you use images and image maps (Priority 1)				
1.2	Provide redundant text links for each active region of a server-side image map.	Presence and location of server-side image maps.	N/a	Provision and appropriateness of additional text links.
9.1	Provide client-side image maps instead of server-side image maps except where the regions cannot be defined with an available geometric shape.	Presence and location of server-side image maps.	N/a	Provision and appropriateness of alternative client-side image maps.

No.	Details	Automated checks (Stage 1)	Socitm checks (Stage 2)	RNIB checks (Stage 3)
And if you use tables (Priority 1)				
5.1	For data tables, identify row and column headers.	N/a	Presence and location of data tables. (Q51 of survey)	Correct coding of simple table headings using table headers (TH).
5.2	For data tables that have two or more logical levels of row or column headers, use markup to associate data cells and header cells.	N/a	Presence and location of data tables. (Q51 of survey)	Correct coding of complex table headings.
And if you use frames (Priority 1)				
12.1	Title each frame to facilitate frame identification and navigation.	Presence and location of, and provision of titles for frames.	N/a	Appropriateness of frame titles.
And if you use applets and scripts (Priority 1)				
6.3	Ensure that pages are usable when scripts, applets, or other programmatic objects are turned off or not supported. If this is not possible, provide equivalent information on an alternative accessible page.	Presence and location of JavaScripts, applets, Flash.	N/a	Robustness of site in functioning when support for these objects is not available.
And if you use multimedia (Priority 1)				
1.3	Until user agents can automatically read aloud the text equivalent of a visual track, provide an auditory description of the important information of the visual track of a multimedia presentation.	Presence and location of audio and video files.	N/a	Need for, and provision of, auditory description of visual multimedia information.
1.4	For any time-based multimedia presentation (eg a movie or animation), synchronise equivalent alternatives (eg captions or auditory descriptions of the visual track) with the presentation.	Presence and location of audio and video files.	N/a	Need for, and provision of, synchronised captions and/or auditory description of multimedia material.
And if all else fails (Priority 1)				
11.4	If, after best efforts, you cannot create an accessible page, provide a link to an alternative page that uses W3C technologies, is accessible, has equivalent information (or functionality), and is updated as often as the inaccessible (original) page.	N/a	Presence and location of text/low graphics alternative pages. (Q54 of survey)	Appropriateness of text/low graphics pages as alternatives to otherwise inaccessible material.

Further information: See section 5.4 for information about GIS
See section 5.7 for summary of survey

If subscriber, visit *How did your council do?*, the subscriber-only area of www.socitm.gov.uk

GIS and accessibility

Context

At present, it is impossible to make graphic presentations of some types of GIS data directly accessible to those using text, speech or Braille formats to access their PC and the Web. Some types of data simply cannot be made directly accessible with the technologies currently available. Various research projects are investigating alternative methods of accessing information, for example the use of variable sound to convey information, or the use of 'virtual reality' technologies to enable information to be explored using a range of senses including touch. But practical implementations of these methods and technologies are some way off.

There are, however, interim accessibility solutions that can be implemented for many types of GIS data. These solutions require that the data is presented in an alternative, text-based format as well as graphically. The most suitable format for accessing and displaying the information will obviously depend on the nature of the information being presented. Relatively simple data might be presented as a table or series of tables in addition to the map presentation. More complex data might have to be summarised, and key elements of the data presented in tabular form.

Key considerations

When you decide what alternative presentations to provide in addition to geographic data, the following questions should be kept in mind:

- Why are people likely to be using the system?

- What kind of information are they likely to be looking for?

The answers to these questions will help to determine which kind of alternative functionality will be best suited to the data in question.

Key requirements
- Provide users with different ways of interrogating the data.

- As far as possible, ensure that users are not limited to particular hardware or software requirements (eg ensure that keyboard users are not excluded).

- Provide users with different ways of being presented with the data.

Different types of data

There are essentially three types of data involved in GIS. Each has different accessibility problems and different approaches for providing alternative, text-based presentations of different types of GIS data which are described below:

1   Individual features

Characteristics
Location details and other information for specific features. For example:

- 'Where's my nearest...?'
  Job centres, council offices, hotels, etc

Typical accessibility problems
- Data presented only in visual, graphic format (eg symbols on a map)

- Use of colour to differentiate between different data elements

- Map controls not keyboard accessible

- Information about individual features displayed dynamically in response to moving the mouse cursor around the map display

Different approaches
- Provide a simple list of all features.

- Provide a simple list of features by category (selected by the user). For example, a list of all job centres within the geographic area covered.

- Provide a simple list of features by category and distance from a specified location (the category and location selected by the user). For example, a list of all hotels and restaurants within 5 miles of a given address or postcode.

2 Databases of information

Characteristics
Discrete data items that can be queried based on location information. For example:

- Who are my councillors?

- What ward do I live in?

Typical accessibility problems
In fact, this type of data is often presented in a reasonably accessible format. Although it incorporates elements of geographic mapping, the resulting information is usually textual in nature and presented in that format. Care does need to be taken, however, to ensure that the problems listed under 'Individual features' above are not created when planning how to present this type of information.

Different approaches
- Provide a simple list of all data (eg all councillors listed alphabetically and/or by ward).

- Provide a simple list of data by category (eg all councillors for a selected ward or a specific address or postcode).

- Provide a simple answer to a specific question (eg the name of the ward for a specific address or postcode).

3 Continuous/variable/statistical data

Characteristics
Data which shows variations, trends, patterns, etc, when viewed as an overlay on a map of a geographic area. For example:

- Land usage

- Population density

- Average household income

- Air pollution levels

Typical accessibility problems
- Data presented only in visual, graphic format (eg overlaid on a map)

- Use of colour to differentiate between different data elements

- Map controls not keyboard accessible

- Ability to manipulate, interact with and interrogate the data only possible via the use of a mouse and a graphical interface

Different approaches
- Provide a written summary of the data for a specific area (eg a description of the population density within a local authority area).

- Provide a simple data table of the information (eg population density figures by ward).

- Provide a data table of information extracted using criteria specified by the user (eg all wards with average household incomes over a specified value).

Tackling accessibility: two examples

Example 1   A system showing population density within a local authority area

This might be shown using gradations of colour overlaid on a map of the local authority area, with the user able to zoom in and out and pan the display around the area covered by the data. We would want the graphic system to be operable using a keyboard as well as a mouse (or other pointing device).

A useful feature would be for the user to be able to select the colour or colours being used to display the data on the map.

In addition to the map presentation, there are some alternative ways for the population density data to be presented for those who are unable to use or access the mapped data:

- By entering a postcode or Ordnance Survey grid reference, the user could obtain a reading of the population density for that location.

- A brief textual summary of the data could be provided, describing the population density around the local authority area, and a table could be provided, listing the towns, villages and/or named areas within the local authority area along with the population density for that location.

Ideally, both of these options should be made available.

Example 2   A system showing key features within an area, eg hotels, restaurants and leisure facilities within a town

With this kind of data, we usually see a map overlaid with symbols showing the feature locations. Sometimes the symbols are clickable, resulting in information about that feature being displayed. The system may also allow the user to zoom in and out and pan the visible area around the map.

Again, we would expect the system to provide keyboard controls as well as mouse control. This might involve controls for cycling through the feature symbols currently displayed on the map, with a visible indication of the currently highlighted symbol, which can then be activated (eg by pressing ENTER) to display the information relating to that feature.

There are a couple of alternative ways in which the same information could be provided for those who cannot access it via the map system:

- In the same way that the 'store finder' functions on some shop websites, a search function could be provided where the user can request details of all features, or all features of a specific type (eg hotels) within a specified range of a postcode. The textual information could then be displayed on a search results page, starting with the feature nearest to the postcode location and working outwards.

- If the number of features in the information database is relatively small, it might be feasible to offer the user the option of listing all features of a specified type, eg all hotels listed in alphabetical order.

And again, if both of these options can be provided (where appropriate), that will make the system more flexible and easier for a greater number of people to use.

WAI Level A requirements

For a site to achieve WAI Level A standard, any GIS data systems included in the site should conform with the following WAI checkpoints:

WAI 1.1: Provide a text equivalent for every non-text element

If Flash or Java Applets are used to present the GIS data, 'alt text' and a brief informative text alternative should be provided. This should be in addition to any alternative presentations which have been made available.

WAI 2.1: Ensure that all information conveyed with colour is also available without colour

As far as technically possible, the GIS data should not rely solely on colour to convey information (eg to distinguish between two different types of data). If possible, users should be able to select patterns and/or text labels as well as colours to enable them to distinguish between different data elements.

Note, though, that the simple use of gradations of a single colour does not count as 'use of colour to convey information' in this context, since these gradations will still be visible even where the colour itself cannot be perceived.

WAI 6.2: Ensure that equivalents for dynamic content are updated when the dynamic content changes

It is essential that the accessible alternatives provide function in such a way that, if the GIS data is updated, the alternative formats also show the updated information.

WAI 6.3: Ensure that pages are usable when scripts, applets, or other programmatic objects are turned off or not supported. If this is not possible, provide equivalent information on an alternative accessible page

It might be possible to make some instances of GIS data compliant with the initial requirement in this checkpoint. In most cases, however, the fallback requirement of providing an accessible alternative will have to be implemented.

WAI 11.4: If, after best efforts, you cannot create an accessible page, provide a link to an alternative page that uses W3C technologies, is accessible, has equivalent information (or functionality), and is updated as often as the inaccessible (original) page

This is the important checkpoint. Since it is not currently possible to make the GIS system directly accessible to some users, it is essential that some kind of alternative is provided.

WAI Level AA requirements

For a site to achieve WAI Level A standard, any GIS systems included in the site should conform with the Level A requirements listed opposite, and also with the following WAI Level A checkpoints:

WAI 2.2: Ensure that foreground and background color combinations provide sufficient contrast when viewed by someone having color deficits or when viewed on a black and white screen.

The system should use good, contrasting colours for its data display, and/or the user should be able to select the colours to be used.

WAI 7.2: Until user agents allow users to control blinking, avoid causing content to blink.

If any aspect of the GIS system includes an option to have items blink under specific circumstances, this should be turned off by default.

WAI 7.4: Until user agents provide the ability to stop the refresh, do not create periodically auto-refreshing pages.

For 'pages', think 'GIS display'. If an option is provided within the GIS system for the display to be updated automatically at a set interval, this should be turned off by default, and the user should be able to control the feature.

Potential problem checkpoints

Given current technology, it is likely that it will be impossible to conform with the following checkpoints.

WAI 6.4: For scripts and applets, ensure that event handlers are input device-independent.

WAI 9.2: Ensure that any element that has its own interface can be operated in a device-independent manner.

WAI 8.1: Make programmatic elements such as scripts and applets directly accessible or compatible with assistive technologies.

Claiming Level AA conformance

Currently, it is necessary to fall back on Level A Checkpoint 11.4 and provide an accessible alternative. It will be necessary to note this in any accessibility standard compliance statements.

Since it is currently not technically possible to make GIS data systems directly compatible with some assistive technologies, our view is that a site should not be disqualified from claiming Level AA conformance purely because of the presence of GIS data, as long as suitable alternatives such as the ones described in the first part of this document are provided.

Donna Smillie, Senior web accessibility consultant, RNIB, September 2005

11 Resilience testing (SiteMorse™)

Introduction

This report uses six tests from the website testing product called SiteMorse provided by SiteMorse Ltd. These tests comprise:

Test 1   Metadata (see section 5.1)

Test 2   Use of access keys (see section 5.4)

Test 3   Service availability (see section 5.8)

Test 4   Home page performance (see section 5.8)

Test 5   Site errors (see section 5.8)

Test 6   e-GMS (see section 8.3)

This appendix provides the specification for these tests and answers some typical questions about the product and interpretation of results.

Comparison with other sectors

The SiteMorse product tests sites from other sectors enabling a useful benchmark for local government. Here we summarise results from three other sectors for those tests that we have applied in this report. It shows that local government lags behind the other two sectors in respect of site errors, but is much better in respect of the simple metadata test.

Sector	Site errors (avge/site)	Service availability	Home page performance	Metadata pass	eGMS pass
Local government	93	95.21%	33%	76%	44%
Central government	72	N/a	N/a	46%	75%
Police services	81	N/a	N/a	53%	N/a
FTSE 100	150	N/a	N/a	67%	N/a

Chart 92 Comparison with other sectors (SiteMorse)

- The local government data covers all local authorities in the UK.

- The central government data features samples of 74 organisations, not the complete sectors, but they are likely to be very representative.

- The data from police services covers 57 police forces, almost the complete sector.

- The FTSE 100 comprises 98 of the top 100 companies in the private sector.

The SiteMorse product

It is important to clarify the way that the SiteMorse results are presented. Throughout this report where we have used the results we have not relied on SiteMorse for its interpretation, but used the raw data from the product. The SiteMorse results are perhaps best known in the form of the SiteMorse league tables, which bring the results together using weightings assigned by the company to all the different tests. Socitm *Insight* interpretation does not use the league tables at all, but does use the results of some of the tests that go into the league table.

Frequently asked questions

The profile of the SiteMorse league tables has given rise to a number of common questions. We have selected a few of the most important ones. The answers are provided by the supplier of SiteMorse.

Q Will simple undeveloped sites do better than complex well-developed sites?

A No, the findings take into account the site size, eg a website with 10 pages and 1 error would score the same as a website with 100 pages and 10 errors — both having page/error ratio of 10:1.

Q Do the tests count the same errors repeated many times?

A No, the errors reported in this survey are unique errors. However, the system also collects the number of absolute errors, ie including the number of occurrences of the same error.

Q How can we be sure about the problems reported by SiteMorse as we do not receive many complaints about problems?

A The great majority of users of the site will not complain, but will leave the site and not come back . The IT analysts, Forrester, report that 58% of users who found problems with a site would not return to that site.

Q My site has already been tested!

A To date we have not discovered another product that can simulate any combination of any user visits to a website. How rigorously has your website been tested?

Q I'm being told the errors are not visible.

A Some errors are not visible in their native state. They will only be visible when you replicate an exact path taken by a visitor to the site and this could take you a considerable time to simulate.

Test 1 Metadata

In reviewing sites, SiteMorse checks the metadata on each page of the site, and a number of separate tests are carried out:

Key page data

SiteMorse tests the key pages of the website that the search engines look for (ensuring that your site can be indexed and hence found and correctly identified). It is worth noting that a number of content management systems also make use of the same page information for the site searching or its indexing.

All the tests performed in this report follow 'server-side redirects' to locate metadata, when required.

Errors

Tests completed, by page and reported as errors

File/html/badmeta

File/html/longmeta

File/html/notitle

File/html/longtitle

Test 2 Use of access keys

This feature allows web designers to make it much easier for people who have some difficulties in using the mouse. The navigation can be programmed in with the help of access keys where functions are built into the keyboard. SiteMorse checks for the way in which access keys are used, according to the UK government standard (see opposite). This test from SiteMorse does not indicate that access keys are obligatory, merely that, if they are used, sites should use the recommended set.

UK Government access keys standard

The **accesskey** attribute, introduced in HTML4.0, is intended to provide keyboard shortcuts in that they provide an alternative form of navigation.

This attribute should be added to the hypertext link element within an HTML page as follows.

 What's New

This addition allows users with limited physical capabilities to navigate the organisation's website more easily. There are some drawbacks, for example:

● functionality depends on the type of operating system you are using

● the attribute is only supported by MS Internet Explorer 4 and above and by Netscape 6x versions

● with Windows-based systems the user has to press the 'Alt key' and the accesskey

● with the Macintosh system the user has to press the 'Ctrl key' and the accesskey.

In the example above, the organisation's 'What's New' page has a '2' value given which should be used consistently throughout the website.

When a user visits your department's website for the first time they bring their collective experience gained from all other sites. It is, therefore, important that UK government websites adopt a constant accesskeys standard. Variations from this will make it more difficult for users as they have to learn new navigational skills each time.

Listed below is the recommended UK Government accesskeys standard:

S — Skip navigation
1 — Home page
2 — What's new
3 — Site map
4 — Search
5 — Frequently asked questions (FAQ)
6 — Help
7 — Complaints procedure
8 — Terms and conditions
9 — Feedback form
0 — Access key details

When this navigational system is made available, it is important to inform your website users, as soon as they enter. Otherwise, users who are least able to do so will be faced with a mouse-dependent navigational system that could have been bypassed. Each page could display a message, eg 'UK government accesskeys system'.

Web managers can extend this system by attributing any one of the other 25 alphabetic characters to pages within their website, but should ensure that the core elements listed above are used. It is important to ensure that the additional keys selected do not compromise shortcut keys used by various browsers, eg Microsoft Internet Explorer 'alt h' drops down the help menu.

Source: *Illustrated handbook for web management teams*,
Office of the e-Envoy (May 2002)

Test 3   Service availability

The SiteMorse tests also allow us to measure technical resilience in terms of service availability. A test was run to check the availability of every local authority website for every hour between 2pm on 11 January 2006 and 12 noon on 21 January 2006. This amounts to 240 tests for 468 websites. The overall performance was 95.2% availability across the sector as a whole, much lower than the 98.2% achieved in 2004 and 2005.

Test 4   Home page performance

This comprises five elements, each of which should be passed at the standard defined below by SiteMorse. The overall performance according to these tests is shown below, supported by the results of the five individual tests. In comparison with 2005, there has been a marked deterioration in the numbers of those who passed all five tests. The test showing the biggest problem is the one relating to server response time. We can only surmise that the increasing load of transactions and services put into council websites in 2005 has led to deteriorating performance.

Tests passed	Sites in 2004	Sites in 2005	Sites in 2006	Change in past 12 months
All five	22	64	5	-92%
Four	70	90	28	-78%
Three	127	118	85	-28%
Two	116	107	130	23%
One	93	70	146	108%
None	39	19	74	289%

Chart 93a Home page performance – by council (SiteMorse)

No Test	Sites passing in 2004	Sites passing in 2005	Sites passing in 2006	Change in past 12 mts
1 Server response times	334	362	40	-86%
2 Speed of downloading	109	179	77	-57%
3 Size of home page	268	299	278	-7%
4 Technical quality	224	274	276	1%
5 Speed test of workstation	161	203	131	-35%
Total passes	1096	1317	774	-41%

Chart 93b Home page performance – by test (SiteMorse)

Test 4.1   Server response times

This test analyses server response times and shows the following results

Standard	Server response	Sites in 2004	Sites in 2005	Sites in 2006
Very good	0.25 seconds or less	334	362	40
Average	0.25 to 0.75 seconds	112	91	166
Poor	Over 0.75 seconds	20	13	256

Chart 94a Home page performance – server response times (SiteMorse)

Note: Two councils blocked access to the test in 2005 and 2006 (one in 2004) and four councils in Dorset now operate from same county-based website.

Test 4.2   Speed of downloading

This test concerns speed, which in effect reflects the web hosting arrangements. Here, the threshold recommended by SiteMorse is 40,000 bps.

Standard	Speed	Sites in 2004	Sites in 2005	Sites in 2006
Good	40,000 bps or more	109	179	76
Average	12,500 – 39,999 bps	270	231	218
Poor	Under 12,499 bps	87	56	166

Chart 94b Home page performance – speed of server (SiteMorse)

Test 4.3   Size of home page

The recommended limit from the *Guidelines for UK government websites* (Office of the e-Envoy, now eGU) is 40k, but the advice from SiteMorse is that this can be relaxed to 100k. The SiteMorse target is actually under 85k; the guidelines, however, specify 40k, so local authorities may wish to aim for the stricter target. In general, the smaller, the better, and all pages should always be made as efficient as they can be without sacrificing necessary quality or functionality.

The test shows the following picture.

Standard	Home page size	Sites in 2004	Sites in 2005	Sites in 2006
Guidelines	Under 40k	52	94	31
Acceptable	40k to 100k	216	205	247
Not acceptable	Over 100k	56	167	184

Chart 94c Home page performance – size of home page (SiteMorse)

Test 4.4   Technical quality

The same tests (see Test 5 opposite) as executed for the whole site (actually, the top 250 pages) have been applied to the home page. They test compliance with international standards, and errors in the home page are likely to diminish the user experience and slow down the opening of the home page.

Standard	Home page errors	Sites in 2004	Sites in 2005	Sites in 2006
Good	Nil	224	274	34
Average	Less than 1 in 10 days	N/a	N/a	241
Poor	One or more	242	192	183

Chart 94d Home page performance — errors (SiteMorse)

For the first time, we have used the average number of home page errors detected in a 10-day period, rather than as in previous years the actual number found at one time.

Sixteen councils, in fact, averaged more than ten errors over such a period.

We have ignored the number of warnings (using the SiteMorse definition), but strictly speaking they should also be reduced to nil. In fact, 16 of the 34 councils with no errors also had no warnings. Warnings are not causing fundamental operational problems, but they represent poor site operating code. They may be affecting the visual display of the website or slowing it down unnecessarily. Frequently they are violations of W3C or IETF standards.

Test 4.5   Speed test of workstation

This test examines the download time of the home page from the server to the workstation. There are three variations that are analysed here:

Workstation at 56 kbps	14 seconds (Home/Modem User)
Workstation at 512 kbps	6 seconds (ADSL User)
Workstations at 1Mbps	4 seconds (Corporate/LAN User)

Sites should pass all three tests. The picture that emerges is shown below:

Standard	Sites in 2004	Sites in 2005	Sites in 2006
All three speed tests passed	161	203	131
Two out of three passed	123	135	111
One out of three passed	71	59	78
No tests passed	111	69	149

Chart 94e Home page performance — speed test of workstation (SiteMorse)

Test 5   Site errors

Errors reported in SiteMorse automated tests of a website are those problems found that are likely to impact negatively on the proper operation of a website. Errors are not only those problems that are immediately visible to the site visitor. They can also, in many cases, be hidden from direct view but nonetheless can cause the site to fail or malfunction. These 'latent defects' are not immediately obvious, but generally cause problems to subsets of users or in circumstances (eg site access) other than those in which the site was originally tested, demonstrated and quality assured.

Errors are essentially identified from one or both of two sources:

● Internationally accepted internet standards and protocols (usually from the IETF or the W3C) — for example: 'html' errors, HTTP protocol violations, etc

● Items that are 'unquestionably wrong' such as: 'page not found', missing images, e-mail addresses that cannot be delivered to websites, web servers that cannot be located at all, pages titled 'untitled document', etc

SiteMorse reports all errors equally, whilst acknowledging that in every case some errors are likely to have a greater or more serious impact than others. However, we are rigorous in not developing any general or universally applied ranking, rating or prioritisation of errors, simply because we believe that these factors can only be applied by internal commercial, operations or technical management in an individual organisation/council. Every organisation has different website objectives, standards, priorities and processes which we are in no position to predetermine without detailed discussion with the individual client. Once this clarification has been agreed, our automated testing can be adjusted or adapted to incorporate these bespoke features and priorities, and included in future tests — generally at some minor additional cost.

In our view, site managers, owners and developers should aim to reduce and maintain their site error count to zero — no site specification incorporates an 'errors allowance' or similar. No organisation knowingly pays for errors, and there are sites (some large) which are 'error-free'.

Some examples of site errors from a much longer list of potential errors include:

- url.mail.badsmtp: Mail server returned unexpected response

- url.mailto.badaddr: mailto URL contains bad address

- file.html.notitle: Title is generic 'untitled document' phrase

- url.badfragment: Illegal character in URL fragment section

- url.badpath: Illegal character in URL path section

- url.badquery: Illegal character in URL query section

- url.badscheme: URL scheme must be specified in lower case

- url.badurl: Illegal character in URL

- url.fetch.accessdenied: Access is denied

Extract from material supplied by SiteMorse

Test 6   e-GMS

For sites that have a '.gov.uk' domain suffix, SiteMorse carries out additional tests on the metadata, checking for compliance with the requirements of the government e-GMS standard. Problems can be reported when data is either missing or incorrect, such as missing 'DC.Title' metadata, or the 'eGMS.Subject.Category' metadata being present but not including a term from the Government Category List (GCL).

Further information: See sections 4.4, 5.1, 5.8 and 8.3 for summary of survey

If subscriber, visit *How did your council do?*, the subscriber-only area of www.socitm.gov.uk to see the detailed results of the survey for each local authority

12 Content management systems

Introduction

This appendix provides supporting information about the survey of content management systems in use in local government. Most of the data has been collected from suppliers of content management systems by the London Borough of Brent as part of the e-Government Register. The data has been extended by a short survey carried out by Socitm *Insight* in January 2006, using an e-mail survey supplemented by phone calls to those who did not reply initially.

Comparisons can be made with data collected in November 2003 and published in *Better connected 2004* when replies were received from all 468 local authorities in the UK.

Results of survey

- 415 councils stated that they did use a content management system (239 in 2004)

- 27 either do not use a system, or did not reply

- 26 districts in Northern Ireland were not invited (but thought mainly not to use a system)

The table opposite analyses those that use a content management system.

Content management system used by local authorities

System in use	No of councils
In-house	51
By suppliers	
Microsoft	59
Goss	33
Open Text	33
IBM	28
Immediacy	20
APLAWS	19
Abacus e-Media	13
Jadu	13
Tridion	11
Web-Labs	10
Mediasurface	8
RedDot	8
Stellent	8
EIBS	7
CIT	6
RoI	6
Hyperwave	5
BOCC	4
Obtree	4
Apollo Digital Developments	3
Business Web Software	3
Macromedia	3
Oracle	3
Paperthin	3
Percussion	3
Tagish	3
Vignette	3
Connect Plus	2
eKnowledge	2
Ellipsis Media	2
Harlequin	2
Interwoven	2
Micromedia	2
NQcontent	2
A Recipe For Success	2
Square Solutions	2
Others	24

Chart 95 Content management systems in use

Further information: See sections 5.7 and 5.9 for use of survey

If subscriber, visit *How did your council do?*, the subscriber-only area of www.socitm.gov.uk to see the detailed results of the survey for each local authority

13   Security testing (Hytec)

Introduction

This appendix defines the methodology undertaken by Hytec Information Security Ltd into the vulnerability of 20 well-developed local authority websites during December 2005. The websites in question cannot be named for the obvious reason of not endangering their security.

Hytec has many years of experience working with public sector organisations. Part of the company's mission statement is 'to assist local authorities in building secure ICT infrastructures that enable information sharing, a cornerstone of transformational government. It has developed a radical new approach to assessing an organisation's vulnerability to attack. Comprising three levels of service, which can be taken individually or collectively, the company assesses an organisation's vulnerability to attack from the internet, from so-called compromised 'de-militarised zones' (DMZs), also known as semi-secure networks, or from compromised hosts on internal networks.

Methodology

The company's vulnerability assessment services are designed for organisations wishing to understand their exposure to risks or breaches of information security. To identify the threat, Hytec normally uses the same three stages as a potential attacker, ie:

- investigating the network

- identifying possible weaknesses

- exploiting vulnerabilities.

The purpose of this particular exercise was to investigate the networks in question and identify whether security vulnerabilities existed, but not to exploit them. The task was to assess a local authority's vulnerability to attack from the internet alone. Accordingly, it involved scanning internet-facing servers for vulnerabilities. For each IP address, the team:

- scanned 65,535 TCP ports, looking for over 1,100 known vulnerabilities. No assumptions are made about what ports a particular service runs on. If the web server runs on port 80 and port 2121, then it will be found and tested

- conducted UDP scans of over 400 known vulnerabilities. Again, no assumptions are made during testing

- conducted application layer scans of known services such as SMTP servers, HTTP servers, FTP servers etc.

On identifying vulnerabilities, the team classified them into high, medium or low risk according to the definitions below:

Level of risk	Security issues
High	Allow immediate remote, or local access or immediate execution of code or commands, with unauthorised privileges.
Medium	Have the potential of granting access or allowing code execution by means of complex or lengthy exploit procedures.
Low	Deny service or provide non-system information that could be used to formulate structured attacks on a target, but not directly gain unauthorised access.

Detailed findings

The exercise uncovered 110 examples of vulnerability in 14 out of the 20 websites. Of these 45 were classed as high risk, 18 as medium risk and 47 as low risk.

Although it is not appropriate to disclose precise individual details of vulnerabilities discovered, all the vulnerabilities identified were on systems located on the 'clean' side of the firewall. The most serious findings were:

- The availability of unused web services and the presence of default installation pages. For example, the installation of Microsoft's IIS web server software will install many services, most of which will not be required but will become vulnerabilities if not constantly patched.

- Many web servers also provide an FTP service. However, since they are insufficiently patched, a number of these FTP portals are at risk from a so-called 'denial of service' attack, whereby strings of corrupt data can be used to disable the FTP server.

- Many web server services, located behind firewalls or native address translation devices, leaked private addresses. While not technically vulnerabilities in themselves, they do provide valuable information to potential hackers. Symptomatic of a poorly configured web service, these can be simply rectified on the web server.

- A number of web services providing encrypted access for online payments were found to be using weak encryption ciphers and potentially insecure protocols.

- One authority provided access to an online management portal using HTTP clear text username and password sign-on. As a minimum, access should only be via HTTPS (SSL encrypted).

- Another authority stored the web service design documentation within a sub folder of the web service. This was identified through a standard scan of the web server and yielded a complete design structure with drawings.

Conclusions

'Defence in depth' (DID) is the only real solution to reducing residual risk to acceptable levels; relying on firewalls alone is not enough. Information security requires continual vigilance. A constant review of vulnerability bulletins and patching is required, potentially through the use of a warning advice and reporting point (WARP). WARPs are part of the National Infrastructure Security Co-ordination Centre (NISCC) information sharing strategy to help combat the increasing risk of electronic attack on information systems.

Local authorities should ensure that systems are 'hardened' as much as possible. One simple way of achieving a 'harder' system is to remove all unnecessary software components. Finally, every organisation should ensure that its information security regime is tested for vulnerability on a frequent and ongoing basis!

Further information: See section 5.9 for main commentary Visit www.niscc.gov.uk

National Infrastructure Security Co-ordination Centre (NISCC)

A fundamental role for any government is to ensure the continuity of society in times of crisis. This often involves providing extra protection to essential services and systems to make them more resistant to disruption and better able to recover quickly.

In the UK, these essential services and systems are known as the Critical National Infrastructure (CNI). The role of NISCC (pronounced 'nicey') is to minimise the risk to the CNI from electronic attack; other parts of government work to protect the CNI from physical attack or natural disasters.

NISCC was set up in 1999 and is an inter-departmental centre drawing on contributions from across government. Defence, Central Government Policy, Trade, the Intelligence Agencies and Law Enforcement all contribute expertise and effort.

In the UK the majority of the CNI is run by the private sector and NISCC works closely with a wide range of companies, many of which have strong international links or are foreign-owned. CNI issues transcend geographical borders and problems can strike anywhere in the world. NISCC therefore operates in a global context.

NISCC has no regulatory, legislative or law enforcement role.

Source: www.niscc.gov.uk

14 Analysis of website usage (Hitwise)

1 Results of Top 100 sites (weighted by population)

Local authority	Type	Region	Visits/ head of population	Market share of visits	Ranking (unweighted)	Ranking (weighted)	Ranking (diff)	Top site
Corporation of London	LB	London	62.62	0.45	57	1	56	✓
Rutland CC	EU	E Mids	11.86	0.41	64	2	62	
Isles of Scilly	EU	S West	9.29	0.02	443	3	440	
Orkney Islands	SA	Scotland	7.79	0.15	214	4	210	
Shetland Islands	SA	Scotland	6.82	0.15	220	5	215	
Suffolk CC	SD	East	3.54	0.75	20	6	14	
Aberdeen City	SA	Scotland	5.89	1.25	5	7	-2	
Western Isles	SA	Scotland	5.66	0.15	221	8	213	
Milton Keynes	EU	S East	4.73	0.98	10	9	1	✓
Isle of Wight	EU	S East	3.99	0.53	39	10	29	✓
Lincoln City	SD	E Mids	3.97	0.34	82	11	71	
Wrexham CBC	WA	Wales	3.89	0.5	46	12	34	✓
Newcastle upon Tyne City	MD	N East	3.70	0.96	11	13	-2	
Weymouth & Portland BC	SD	S West	3.46	0.22	142	14	128	
Aberdeenshire	SA	Scotland	3.44	0.78	17	15	2	✓
Clackmannanshire	SA	Scotland	3.33	0.16	212	16	196	✓
Highland	SA	Scotland	3.16	0.66	23	17	6	
York, City of	EU	York/Humb	3.15	0.57	33	18	15	
Herefordshire	EU	W Mids	3.07	0.29	101	19	82	
Tameside MBC	MD	N West	3.05	0.65	24	20	4	✓
Westminster	LB	London	2.98	0.54	38	21	17	✓
Carmarthenshire CC	WA	Wales	2.94	0.51	44	22	22	✓
Manchester City	MD	N West	2.90	1.14	6	23	-17	
Denbighshire CC	WA	Wales	2.90	0.27	110	24	86	✓
Dundee City	SA	Scotland	2.89	0.42	62	25	37	
Exeter City	SD	S West	2.79	0.31	91	26	65	
Bath & North East Somerset	EU	S West	2.78	0.47	52	27	25	
Flintshire CC	WA	Wales	2.69	0.4	65	28	37	
Swindon BC	EU	S West	2.61	0.47	51	29	22	
Wolverhampton MBC	MD	W Mids	2.60	0.39	66	30	36	
Dartford BC	SD	S East	2.56	0.22	146	31	115	
Darlington BC	EU	N East	2.56	0.25	123	32	91	
Cardiff County	WA	Wales	2.55	0.78	15	33	-18	
Bournemouth BC	EU	S West	2.51	0.41	63	34	29	
Eastbourne BC	SD	S East	2.45	0.22	140	35	105	
Stirling	SA	Scotland	2.44	0.21	147	36	111	✓
Swansea, City & County	WA	Wales	2.37	0.53	42	37	5	
Kensington & Chelsea	LB	London	2.33	0.37	73	38	35	✓
Moray	SA	Scotland	2.30	0.2	158	39	119	
Hampshire CC	CC	S East	2.21	2.74	1	40	-39	
Hertfordshire CC	CC	East	2.20	2.27	2	41	-39	✓
Durham CC	SD	N East	2.19	1.08	273	42	231	✓
Chichester DC	SD	S East	2.16	0.23	133	43	90	
South Ayrshire	SA	Scotland	2.14	0.24	126	44	82	✓
Gwynedd CC	WA	Wales	2.14	0.25	118	45	73	✓
Hastings	SD	S East	2.12	0.18	175	46	129	
Argyll & Bute	SA	Scotland	2.08	0.19	172	47	125	
Chester City	SD	N West	2.03	0.24	130	48	82	✓
North Lincolnshire	EU	York/Humb	2.03	0.31	92	49	43	✓
Calderdale MBC	MD	York/Humb	2.03	0.39	69	50	19	
Richmond	LB	London	2.03	0.29	100	51	49	
Brent	LB	London	2.01	0.53	40	52	-12	✓
Bracknell Forest	EU	S East	2.01	0.22	141	53	88	✓
Gloucester City	SD	S West	2.00	0.22	135	54	81	

Local authority	Type	Region	Visits/ head of population	Market share of visits	Ranking (unweighted)	Ranking (weighted)	Ranking (diff)	Top site
Ceredigion CC	WA	Wales	1.99	0.15	219	55	164	
Crewe & Nantwich BC	SD	N West	1.98	0.22	139	56	83	
Edinburgh, The City of	SA	Scotland	1.94	0.87	14	57	-43	
Oxford City	SD	S East	1.94	0.26	114	58	56	
St Edmondsbury BC	SD	East	1.94	0.19	164	59	105	
Rotherham MBC	MD	York/Humb	1.93	0.48	49	60	-11	
Southampton City	EU	S East	1.93	0.42	61	61	0	
Northumberland CC	CC	N East	1.89	0.58	30	62	-32	
Devon CC	CC	S West	1.89	1.33	4	63	-59	✓
Wandsworth	LB	London	1.88	0.49	48	64	-16	✓
Rother DC	SD	S East	1.87	0.16	205	65	140	
Stoke-on-Trent City	EU	W Mids	1.87	0.45	56	66	-10	
Harrogate BC	SD	York/Humb	1.85	0.28	108	67	41	
Kingston upon Hull City	EU	York/Humb	1.85	0.45	59	68	-9	
Angus	SA	Scotland	1.85	0.2	161	69	92	
Salford City	MD	N West	1.80	0.39	67	70	-3	✓
Peterborough City	EU	East	1.79	0.28	109	71	38	
Woking BC	SD	S East	1.78	0.16	203	72	131	
Torbay	EU	S West	1.77	0.23	134	73	61	
Kingston	LB	London	1.77	0.26	115	74	41	
Warwickshire CC	CC	W Mids	1.76	0.89	12	75	-63	✓
Cambridge City	SD	East	1.75	0.19	165	76	89	
North Cornwall DC	SD	S West	1.74	0.14	223	77	146	
Tunbridge Wells BC	SD	S East	1.73	0.18	184	78	106	
Waverley BC	SD	S East	1.73	0.2	160	79	81	
Norwich City	SD	East	1.73	0.21	151	80	71	
Medway	EU	S East	1.72	0.43	60	81	-21	✓
Nottingham City	EU	E Mids	1.72	0.46	54	82	-28	
North East Lincolnshire	EU	York/Humb	1.71	0.27	112	83	29	
Hammersmith & Fulham	LB	London	1.69	0.28	105	84	21	
Dumfries & Galloway	SA	Scotland	1.69	0.25	120	85	35	
East Riding of Yorkshire	EU	York/Humb	1.69	0.53	41	86	-45	
Newport CBC	WA	Wales	1.68	0.23	132	87	45	
Gateshead MBC	MD	N East	1.67	0.32	86	88	-2	
Shrewsbury & Atcham BC	SD	W Mids	1.67	0.16	201	89	112	✓
Barrow-in-Furness BC	SD	N West	1.67	0.12	243	90	153	
East Lothian	SA	Scotland	1.67	0.15	217	91	126	
Wokingham	EU	S East	1.66	0.25	122	92	30	
East Ayrshire	SA	Scotland	1.66	0.2	159	93	66	✓
Taunton Deane BC	SD	S West	1.66	0.17	190	94	96	
Caerphilly CB	WA	Wales	1.65	0.28	102	95	7	
Bexley	LB	London	1.65	0.36	75	96	-21	
Isle of Anglesey CC	WA	Wales	1.65	0.11	257	97	160	
North Somerset	EU	S West	1.64	0.31	90	98	-8	
Doncaster MBC	MD	York/Humb	1.64	0.47	50	99	-49	
Wirral MBC	MD	N West	1.63	0.51	45	100	-55	

Chart 96 Weighted market share of usage

Key:

- **Type** denotes type of local authority.
- **Region** is the English region for the local authority (or Scotland or Wales).
- **Visits/head of population** is the market share of local government weighted by the population for the area (National Census 2001).
- **Market share of visits** is the unweighted figure supplied by Hitwise.
- **Ranking (unweighted)** is the ranking (1 to 468) in the unweighted market share as supplied by Hitwise.

- **Ranking (weighted)** is the ranking (1 to 468) in the market share weighted by the population for the area (National Census 2001).
- **Ranking (diff)** is the difference between the two rankings. A positive figure indicates that the council has a higher market share than one might expect for its population. A negative figure indicates that the council has a lower market share than one might expect.
- **Top site** indicates that the site has been quoted in one of the lists of top councils by type of authority

2 Top 100 sites with greatest increases in usage from 2005

We can also show those councils that have moved up the most in the table of weighted market share in comparison with 2005.

Local authority	Type	Region	Visits/ head of population	Ranking 2005 (weighted)	2005 to 2006	Ranking 2006 (weighted)
Clackmannanshire	SA	Scotland	3.33	461	445	16
Flintshire CC	WA	Wales	2.69	451	423	28
North Cornwall DC	SD	S West	1.03	457	380	77
North Ayrshire	SA	Scotland	2.62	438	314	124
Hertfordshire CC	CC	East	2.21	333	292	41
Luton BC	EU	East	1.19	442	265	177
Crewe & Nantwich BC	SD	N West	1.98	270	214	56
Maidstone BC	SD	S East	1.15	388	201	187
Halton BC	EU	N West	1.44	317	190	127
Powys CC	WA	Wales	1.50	306	187	119
Antrim BC	NI	N. Ireland	1.03	411	186	225
Amber Valley BC	SD	E Mids	1.20	384	183	201
Lichfield DC	SD	W Mids	0.97	432	181	251
Merthyr Tydfil CBC	WA	Wales	1.61	276	174	102
Worcester City	SD	W Mids	1.29	323	169	154
Dacorum BC	SD	East	1.38	303	164	139
North Shropshire DC	SD	W Mids	1.05	383	164	219
Norwich City	SD	East	1.73	240	160	80
Conwy CBC	WA	Wales	1.55	264	153	111
South Norfolk DC	SD	East	1.35	298	153	145
Macclesfield BC	SD	N West	1.20	329	153	176
Staffordshire Moorlands DC	SD	W Mids	0.85	434	139	295
Eden DC	SD	N West	1.61	238	135	103
Stafford BC	SD	W Mids	1.08	346	133	213
Vale of Glamorgan	WA	Wales	1.43	262	132	130
Castle Morpeth BC	SD	N East	1.22	297	131	166
Newtownabbey BC	NI	N. Ireland	1.00	360	121	239
Scottish Borders	SA	Scotland	1.59	226	120	106
Wakefield MDC	MD	York/Humb	1.21	292	120	172
Bridgnorth DC	SD	W Mids	0.95	374	117	257
Harrogate BC	SD	York/Humb	1.85	181	114	67
Durham City	CC	N East	0.66	304	114	190
Three Rivers DC	SD	East	0.97	364	114	250
Eastleigh BC	SD	S East	1.38	252	112	140
Gwynedd CC	WA	Wales	2.23	156	111	45
Derwentside DC	SD	N East	1.18	293	111	182
Barrow-in-Furness BC	SD	N West	1.67	200	110	90
Teesdale DC	SD	N East	0.82	414	108	306
Tonbridge & Malling BC	SD	S East	0.65	467	108	359
Carrick DC	SD	S West	1.25	267	107	160
Reading BC	EU	S East	1.19	286	107	179
West Dunbartonshire	SA	Scotland	0.64	468	105	363
West Lothian	SA	Scotland	1.13	295	103	192
Poole, Borough of	EU	S West	1.59	207	100	107
Moyle DC	NI	N. Ireland	0.63	465	97	368
Mansfield DC	SD	E Mids	1.22	263	95	168
Tynedale DC	SD	N East	0.85	385	93	292
Breckland DC	SD	East	0.82	394	92	302
Alnwick DC	SD	N East	1.29	244	91	153
Selby DC	SD	York/Humb	1.05	311	91	220

Local authority	Type	Region	Visits/ head of population	Ranking 2005 (weighted)	2005 to 2006	Ranking 2006 (weighted)
Derbyshire CC	CC	E Mids	1.05	314	90	224
Chester-le-Street DC	SD	N East	0.74	419	89	330
Broxtowe BC	SD	E Mids	0.93	350	87	263
Darlington BC	EU	N East	2.56	117	85	32
Redditch BC	SD	W Mids	0.63	446	82	364
Stockport MBC	MD	N West	1.05	299	81	218
Omagh DC	NI	N. Ireland	0.63	450	80	370
Kettering BC	SD	E Mids	1.10	285	79	206
Carlisle City	SD	N West	0.89	392	78	314
Gosport BC	SD	S East	0.92	347	76	271
North Somerset	EU	S West	1.70	173	75	98
Purbeck DC	SD	S West	1.13	271	75	196
East Sussex CC	CC	S East	0.00	334	74	260
Warwick DC	SD	W Mids	0.87	358	74	284
Craigavon BC	NI	N. Ireland	0.62	447	74	373
Doncaster MBC	MD	York/Humb	1.67	172	73	99
Wansbeck DC	SD	N East	0.65	429	72	357
North Warwickshire BC	SD	W Mids	0.65	431	70	361
Portsmouth City	EU	S East	1.12	266	68	198
West Somerset DC	SD	S West	1.43	195	66	129
Elmbridge BC	SD	S East	1.31	215	66	149
East Lindsey DC	SD	E Mids	0.92	362	66	296
Richmondshire DC	SD	York/Humb	0.85	356	65	291
Windsor & Maidenhead, RB of	EU	S East	1.27	219	64	155
Ryedale DC	SD	York/Humb	0.98	309	64	245
Coventry City	MD	W Mids	0.90	338	64	274
Oxford City	SD	S East	2.01	120	62	58
South Northamptonshire DC	SD	E Mids	0.76	387	62	325
Rotherham MBC	MD	York/Humb	1.97	121	61	60
Blackburn with Darwen BC	EU	N West	1.67	166	61	105
Salisbury DC	SD	S West	1.40	196	61	135
Huntingdonshire DC	SD	East	1.02	290	61	229
Lancaster City	SD	N West	0.82	365	61	304
St. Edmondsbury BC	SD	East	2.04	119	60	59
Cookstown DC	NI	N. Ireland	0.61	435	60	375
Caerphilly CB	WA	Wales	1.71	154	59	95
Boston BC	SD	E Mids	1.08	272	58	214
Bromsgrove DC	SD	W Mids	0.68	405	56	349
Chester City	SD	N West	2.03	103	55	48
Coleraine BC	NI	N. Ireland	0.89	335	55	280
Chesterfield BC	SD	E Mids	0.81	363	55	308
Dumfries & Galloway	SA	Scotland	1.69	139	54	85
East Lothian	SA	Scotland	1.67	143	52	91
Test Valley BC	SD	S East	0.82	357	52	305
Copeland BC	SD	N West	0.58	439	52	387
Torbay	EU	S West	1.77	124	51	73
East Ayrshire	SA	Scotland	1.66	144	51	93
Monmouthshire CC	WA	Wales	1.41	183	51	132
West Lancashire DC	SD	N West	0.83	352	51	301
Uttlesford DC	SD	East	1.16	234	50	184

Chart 97 Weighted market share of usage (changes in 12 months)

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15   Visitor feedback (speed-trap)

This appendix describes the tests carried out during January 2006 by speed-trap Ltd using its *Prophet E-gov Intelligence* product into the way in which visitors find their way to and their way around council websites. The test carried out on five local authority websites was the use of click maps to identify the most popular features of the home page as demonstrated by looking at the actual mouse clicks made by users.

Section 6.5 summarises the results from this test, illustrating it with the home page of Kensington & Chelsea. This appendix provides supporting data and commentary about the results from the other four councils in the test:

That part of the image enclosed by the dotted line indicates the part of the page most usually seen on initial viewing.

● Cotswold DC

● East Ayrshire

● Exeter City

● Salford City

Every time a visitor to the site uses their mouse to click on any part of the web page, the system records it as a red dot. The click map shows clustering around popular areas and, when used in conjunction with other website analysis tools, can provide valuable information on the customer 'journey'. Click maps can be produced for any web pages, but we chose to restrict this survey to the home page.

An interesting point, which was observed on all the home page click maps, was that, where there is an address such as the main council address, there are also many clicks. This suggests that users are expecting a link and web managers should consider making the whole address into a link for further contact information. Getting this section right by making the links easy to find, with useful maps, directions, car parking, access and transport information, could pay dividends.

It was immediately clear that, in sites where the user needs to scroll down the page, the number of clicks reduces compared with the principal viewing area. A possible trick for encouraging inexperienced users to scroll down the home page, to search for more services, may be to make a popular feature such as 'Quick Find' straddle the scroll point. We can see the clear effect of this in East Ayrshire's home page.
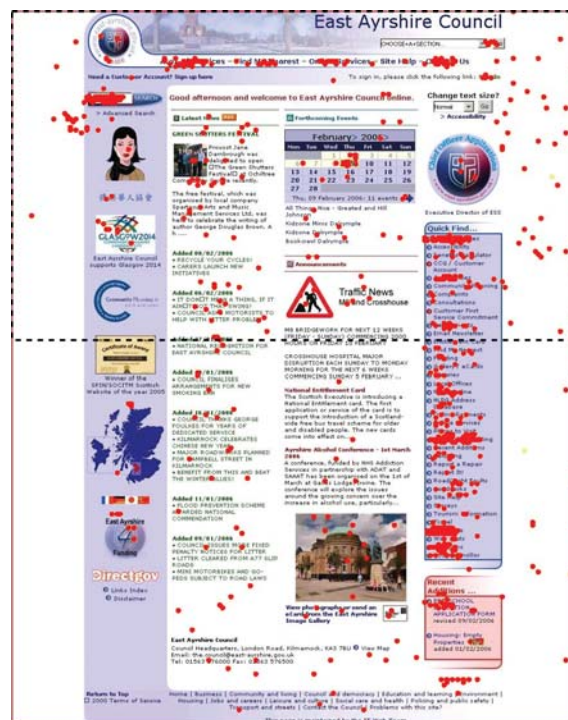
The reason for this might be that users do not realise they need to scroll down, particularly if they are new to the internet. Alternatively, it could be that a conscious decision has been made to place the less popular links lower down on the page; most probably, it is a combination of both.

Certainly, the evidence is that the click map becomes very much sparser as we look down the home page at Cotswold DC and this affects all sections apart from 'Online services'. Further investigations and experimenting with different designs may enable the home page to be rationalised. Online planning and jobs on all sites continue to be very popular and definitely warrant inclusion in the home page.

If we consider the use of the links to portals such as DirectGov, we see for all sites taking part, there is virtually no activity, irrespective of the icon's prominence. This is the same for most of the links which appear purely as icons and it would be worth investigating the use of a more descriptive link. Perhaps this illustrates the need for alternative text on icons to serve a dual purpose; firstly to describe the image and, secondly, to give an indication of why you might want to click the icon.

Cotswold has a home page with many items of news, with lively articles of local interest and plenty of consultation, and it appears that people are making good use of this. All the local authorities in this survey are using their home pages to promote local news and we can see how important it is to cover local emergencies by looking at the hot topic of contaminated water in Exeter City.
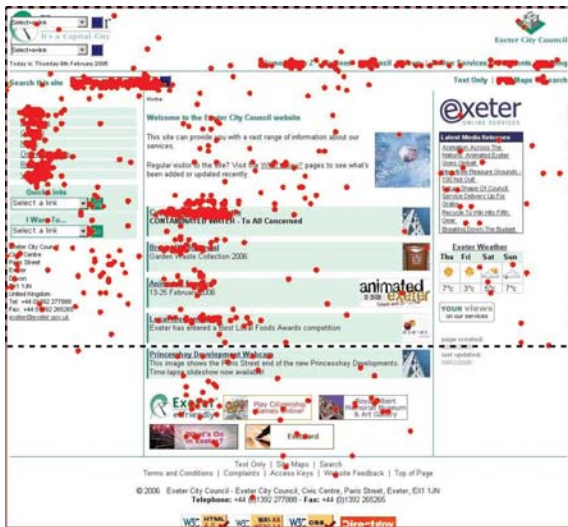
Any click map will provide a clear view of 'hot topics', which are not actual links and could cause much frustration to the user. We have already mentioned in Section 6.5 the example of the address field at Kensington & Chelsea, but users were also clicking on Exeter City's 'Welcome' banner. Salford City also found that visitors clearly presumed that the press release headline is 'clickable' and is now looking at ways in which this can be addressed without necessarily having to make it a link.

One of the most active parts of Salford's home page is the right-hand navigation column labelled as 'Quick links'. Salford is now posing the question, that, if these links are being accessed so frequently, should they consider moving them to give them more prominence? This can be rapidly addressed by changing the prominence and confirming the results with more click maps.

A new element on Salford's home page is the introductory text box in the left margin. This area is intended to introduce the content and purpose of the website and to provide links to key content. These links are clearly popular with visitors as a means of getting into the main information pages of the website. If we compare this with the limited use of the graphical icons, perhaps users are more comfortable with text.

Further information: See section 6.5 for main commentary

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