

To EURIM Members and Observers
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THE EUROPEAN
INFORMATION
SOCIETY GROUP

EURIM



EURIM Newsletter April 2007

Contents

- 1) Re-branding EURIM
- 2) Political Dialogues on Socially Inclusive, Mixed Economy and Democratised Delivery
- 3) Call for UK Leadership on Internet Governance and Policing
- 4) UK Competitiveness in the Age of the Knowledge Economy
- 5) Progress on Information and Identity Management and Sharing
- 6) Update on Current Consultations and Recent Reports

1) Re-branding EURIM

In January the EURIM Governing Council requested a three-year forward strategy and a change of name and strap line to better describe what we do: bringing together politicians, industry, officials and other interest groups on issues related to the creation of a wealth generating, socially inclusive and democratically accountable Information Society. The first step was to produce a two by A4 “think note” This is in the members’ area of the website (www.eurim.org.uk) and is being sent to members for discussion at the AGM and decision at the next Council.

2) Political Dialogues on Socially Inclusive, Mixed Economy and Democratised Delivery

Political debate on the use of technology to transform the delivery of public services has moved on to embrace use of the Internet to involve the public in setting priorities and monitoring performance. The Royal Society of Arts (www.theRSA.org/SpecialEvents) and ippr (www.ippr.org) have organised relevant activities and the podcasts on www.rsa.org.uk/audio/index.asp provide a good introduction.

The Hansard Society has a meeting on the evening of 18th April on whether the Internet can enhance public engagement (e-mail hans_admin@hansard.les.ac.uk to register) and RSA has an all-day conference on 25th May. But interest in the potential is not yet matched by discussion of how this might be managed, e.g. by building on commercial experience and using techniques to improve customer contact and service, as well as politically to raise funds and organise campaigns.

EURIM is therefore organising three “hearings”, at which parliamentary members will have the opportunity to question “witnesses” on the impact of new technologies on social inclusion, the practicality of delivering services through “mixed economy” partnerships, and the use of social networking techniques to identify community priorities and to empower citizens in improving performance through effective feedback, monitoring and responsiveness. The “hearings” have been provisionally scheduled for 8, 9 or 10 May, 5,6 or 7 June and 12, 13 or 14 June.

The precise topics and timings will be agreed with participants but discussions to date indicate a matrix of issues to be addressed by politicians from left and right with aspirations to deliver genuinely citizen-centric services at affordable cost. Members of the organising group are in touch with those working on policy formation for the major parties, and the outcomes will inform the comprehensive spending review. Work in this area is now both important and urgent.

Please e-mail Dave Wright davywright2@ntlworld.com if you would like to help organise or participate in the dialogues, whether as a written or oral witness or political questioner.

3) Call for UK Leadership on Internet Governance and Policing

At the 2007 e-Crime Congress on 29th March, attended by law enforcement and industry delegates from over 30 nations, the Rt Hon Alun Michael MP, said that the UK had "a unique opportunity to shape the future of the a world dominated by the Internet and electronic transactions. Are we going to take the opportunity for leadership or are we going to miss the boat?" His full text is at http://www.eurim.org.uk/activities/ecrime/070328_eCrimeConference_AlunMichael.pdf.

After criticising the "fog of initiatives, a mass of malware reports, a plethora of people with a solution to sell", he welcomed the plans of the Metropolitan Police for a co-ordinating unit. But industry needed to create a sort of "co-operative e-Torchwood" to deal with the developing issues and get ahead of the game. We also needed to address the issues of governance together, creating a UK network that could drive the world, including the US, through genuine partnership, building on the position of London as the world centre for international disputes resolution "under whatever legal process the participants wish ... albeit with a focus on recovering the losses and bankrupting the miscreants and their allies, rather than sending anyone to jail." He finished with the need to ensure constructive discussion later this year at the next Internet Governance forum in Rio de Janeiro, in full co-operation with those from South America, Russia, China and India – not just Europe and America.

We plan to address the means of creating the partnership necessary in the context of the follow up to successful discussions with the Internet Caucus at the beginning on February (report currently being reviewed for publication). The first follow up, for congressional staffers visiting the UK, has already been agreed and those wishing to join the planning team for other, more ambitious, activities should e-mail me to register interest. In parallel, members of the E-Crime group are working on a number of "operational" initiatives, some of which are likely to be announced at Infosec later this month. See www.infosec.co.uk.

4) UK competitiveness in the Age of the Knowledge Economy.

We are planning a major event at the House of Commons to explore the growing challenge to the United Kingdom's competitiveness as an innovation economy. Full details will be sent to members as soon as the arrangements are complete - especially if you express interest now to Emma Fryer emma.fryer@eurim.org. [Note: The original suggestion of 25th April for this event proved impossible, so please delete if that date is in your diary].

This will be a wide-ranging meeting, with leading representatives of four different industry sectors asking what is needed to make the UK a location of choice for their type of business, exploring the factors that influence the choice of location and examining the places emerging as increasingly attractive alternative locations. International competition for knowledge businesses employing highly skilled, high value personnel is becoming ever more sharp. Many companies are under intense pressure to leave us and many of the jobs at risk are in those constituencies over which the next election will be fought hardest.

The event will follow up the recent publication of "*A Flourishing Innovation Economy – How the UK must Attract and Retain Knowledge Based Businesses*", in which the EURIM Knowledge Economy group analysed on four sides of A4 the importance of knowledge-based businesses to the UK economy, and the critical need to attract and retain them, without which the UK faces inevitable and catastrophic economic decline. The report examines the ephemeral nature of knowledge businesses (which can locate their operations anywhere in the world), the factors that matter to them when choosing a location for their operations, the economic risk of losing them and the policy steps required to ensure we continue to attract and retain such businesses. It also stresses how urgently action is needed.

Parliamentary involvement is critical to delivering the public policy elements - education, tax, labour markets and regulatory climate - that create the environment for knowledge employment to flourish. If you would like to participate on this subject please e-mail emma.fryer@eurim.org.

5) Progress on Information and Identity Management and Sharing

On 14th March the Personal Identity Group was briefed on progress with the DWP customer Information System and the way this can be used, within existing contracts, to support the National Identity Register and other central and local government applications.

The meeting was attended by most of the “Top 20” ICT suppliers to Government, several of the UK’s largest private sector and local government managers of identity and authentication and observers from Cabinet office, NAO and OGC. The implications of what was said were profound and the opening presentation was described by one participant as “a long overdue outbreak of common sense”. The full report is in the members’ area of the website. The next meeting, planned for 9th May, is with James Hall, new chief executive of the Identity and Passport Service.

The sub group on data sharing protocols is currently reviewing nearly 50 examples from across Local Government with a view to producing a spreadsheet to enable comparison and the identification of best practice (as opposed to best theory) by application area..

6) Update on Current Consultations and Recent Reports

There has been the usual flow of meetings on TVWF, now the Audio-visual Media Services Directive, and on Data Retention but one of the most important (in terms of breaking new ground) meetings this month was probably the BCS Lovelace Lecture when Sir Tim Berners-Lee described the past, present and future of the Web, including why CERN decided that it would never charge for the IPR involved.

Sir Tim’s description of the methodology for managing the forward evolution of the web had profound implications for those seeking to make sense of the political battles over Internet neutrality and governance. The IPV6 Internet, including switches and routers, is increasingly being driven from China and the Far East, albeit using many of the most creative minds of the West. His description of how to stimulate, but also harness, those minds to address the problems created by each generation of success was felt by many of his audience to offer a better means of preserving our intellectual competitiveness than attempts to plan, regulate and control future creativity to so as to protect that of the past.

See www.bcs.org/server.php?show=nav.8997 for the video-stream of his lecture.