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**Minutes of the EURIM Transformational Government Policy Dialogue Hearing on Social Inclusion held on 8 November 2007, 1400-1600 hours in the Thatcher Room, Portcullis House, Westminster**

Parliamentarians present on the Panel: Margaret Moran MP (Chair; Labour, Luton South), Tim Boswell MP (Conservative, Daventry), Philip Dunne MP (Conservative, Ludlow), Earl of Erroll (Crossbencher), Malcolm Harbour MEP (Conservative, West Midlands), Lord Archy Kirkwood (Liberal Democrat), Rt Hon Alun Michael MP (Labour, Cardiff South and Penarth), Chris Mole MP (Ipswich).

Also on Panel: Peter Buchanan (Social Inclusion Session leader); Cllr. David Hopkins (Milton Keynes)

Witnesses: Naomi Eisenstadt (Social Exclusion Task Force), Sir David Varney (Advisor to the Prime Minister), Judy Walker (Citizens Advice) and Cllr. Kevin Wilson (Woughton Ward, Milton Keynes) with 2 residents – Naeema Ahmad and Tina El-Shabrawy.

Panel Apologies: Justine Greening MP, Ian Stewart MP, Dr Phyllis Starkey MP, Mark Todd MP, Derek Wyatt MP.

## **1. Introduction**

1.1 Margaret Moran MP welcomed the witnesses, and explained that the hearing is part of the work EURIM is doing on Transformational Government – a major Government policy exercise intended to put citizens and business at the heart of public service delivery, rather than at the convenience of civil servants. Despite the organisation of the seating, whereby witnesses appear before a ‘horseshoe’ shaped layout of panel members, as in Select Committee hearings, the ‘Policy Dialogues’ were not intended to be confrontational, but would engage with witnesses in a dialogue about their experiences. The panel wished to know how the experience, knowledge and information witnesses had gained could help them as Parliamentarians to make transformational government a reality – with excellent public service delivery for all citizens.

1.2 The panel and witnesses introduced themselves. The Chair explained that the theme of the hearing is focused strongly on Social Inclusion, and how to ensure that those who are most in need of public services receive them in the best way possible.

## **2. Witness testimony**

2.1 MM invited witnesses to make a brief statement of their position, their experience of public service delivery, and how they think Government could make it better.

### Judy Walker

2.2 JW declared that citizen centricity of services is the paramount aim of Citizens Advice. The CA work with 430 local CA bureaux in England and Wales, with sister organisations in Scotland and N Ireland. Many clients are on low incomes, have experienced social and financial exclusion, and typically have multiple, interconnected problems requiring interaction with different government departments and local authorities. However, as a consequence of officials not talking to each other, the customer may get lost in the system.

2.3 The aims of the CA are to provide the citizen with advice, and to collect evidence from client-government interactions in order to try to influence policy development at both central and local government levels. Last year, CA resolved 5.7 million problems for > 2 million people; 1 in 4 clients have problems with benefits, including form-filling, poor administration (e.g. delays, mistakes, lost forms), and the need for representation at appeals. Many of the problems can thus be attributed to poor and uncoordinated service from government. 2006 saw a 15% increase in the number of tax

credit enquiries received by CA; 24% of all new cases involve enquiries about benefit and tax credits. Many of these are avoidable systemic problems that could be easily resolved if effective channels for interaction with citizens existed.

#### Naomi Eisenstadt

2.4 NE related 2 personal information-sharing anecdotes. When she visited an Oxford hospital with her 7 year old son, the duty nurse immediately put both mother and child at ease with a welcoming 'Hello Nathan'. Such a simple greeting had a transforming effect, was a perfect example of how to provide a personal service, and cost nothing.

2.5 A mother with a child having complex disabilities has to see different specialists and relate the same birth experience 8 times, provide her name and address 8 times etc – a process at once both stressful and inefficient. Information sharing would avoid this, save professionals' time and provide a more personalised service.

2.6 NE explained that as part of her work for the Social Exclusion Task Force, she visited Styal Womens' Prison. A group of women receiving drug treatment had a positive attitude, and had resolved to become free of drugs. However, on enquiring, it transpired that several of the 8 women in treatment had nowhere to live once they left prison. In one case, the prisoner was running up rent arrears because the landlord was unaware of the prison sentence. This rendered her ineligible for social housing on release, and this failure of information rendered the chances of her re-offending extremely high.

2.7 Official data held on the sons of male offenders shows that 60% of boys with a father in prison will go on to be offenders themselves. Appropriate information sharing leading to support being given to the family when the father is jailed might impact significantly on this problem. This would provide a better service to the individual and also save money.

#### Sir David Varney

2.8 DV remarked that in terms of the size of the system, there are very few comparators globally. ~82% of the UK population is affected by Government in a typical year, with massive and complex systems often trying to deliver multiple outcomes. The design of the present system can be traced back to 1918, when the vertical arrangement with devolved agencies, each with its own brand and implementation statutes, was developed under Prime Minister David Lloyd-George. Some of these agencies were expressly forbidden in law from sharing information except under certain circumstances because of concern about its misuse.

2.9 There is a wide range of incompatible computer systems, and the citizen's interests are subordinated to the departmental interest. Thus the bereaved citizen is not dealt with as a person in bereavement, but is given forms to be filled in and returned to all departments and agencies concerned. Some parts of the system, both nationally and at local level, are now beginning to deliver more satisfactory outcomes, and best practice is being encouraged across the board.

2.10 This problem is common to governments across the world, and the UK model is seen by many as one which others wish to emulate. Nevertheless, there is an enormous amount to do, and all the while the private sector is also improving with new technology enabling further innovation. We have to balance the efficiencies and effectiveness gained against the risk to civil liberties and privacy concerns. Since the Varney Report was released, the CSR has been published, together with the 30 cross-government public service agreements encouraging further collaboration. There is also a specific series of service transformation agreements that will be driven by cabinet subcommittees.

#### Kevin Wilson

2.11 KW informed the hearing that the 2 residents present and he represented Woughton Ward in Milton Keynes, the most deprived part of the city. KW was a borough councillor of 30 years standing, Naeema Ahmad is a resident of the ward with personal experience of unsatisfactory public services but who has become an advocate for others in the community, and engaged in a healthy lifestyles project for black and Asian women in the area. Tina El-Shabrawy has recently become an elected parish councillor, an advocate and a member of the local residents association.

2.12 KW gave as an example of poor service delivery within a 'rules first, people last' culture, the case of a 50 yr old alcoholic woman being abused by her daughter, who was then given an attached social worker, though she had no telephone. Her accommodation had a front door that she hadn't

been able to lock from the outside for 18 months. While this would appear to be a relatively straightforward problem to fix, the Council kept sending workers round, 10 visits in all, but she would not answer the door. She was also in arrears with rental payments due to forgetfulness. All problems have since been resolved, but only after considerable time and expense which with a better understanding of the individual's problems could have been sorted much earlier.

2.13 A second case involved a person living in a 3-bedroom council property with 6 children, who had been on the waiting list for years for a 4-bedroom house. With no realistic chance of a 4-bedroom property becoming available, this person identified a larger 3-bedroom property on another, less popular, estate, but the system would not allow him to take it because he was on the list for 4-bedroom house!

2.14 A third case illustrating how people can be missed by the system involved a disabled, very sick, housebound man, who required someone to carry him down stairs and put in wheelchair to get out. Visits by health care and social workers had not led to an improvement in the man's situation, and much later, after coming to KW's attention, he was offered suitable alternative accommodation but only on condition that he viewed it before he was allowed to take it. Physically unable to do this, the man died before he could move after the council eventually agreed it could perhaps waive its rule.

2.15 KW commented that there is no shortage of people, 1 in 3 are public servants, the challenge being to join up silos at the local level. Improved service delivery should include a capacity-building agenda that involves community engagement, advocacy and governance. An example of how this might be provided by the system is a well-used local family and community centre provided by the Council originally as a social care service, but essentially run by the residents. This allows people to access capacity and advocacy building skills. In such an environment, community representatives can be much closer to the people they serve, and people are readily able to access services to which they are entitled, and provide positive support to each other. They can do this by connecting silos at a local level, and so services are provided not *to* the community, but rather are available *of* the community.

#### Tina El-Shabrawy

2.16 Tina told the hearing that her son has Asberger's Syndrome and sometimes becomes suicidal. While he was perhaps overly protected at school, once he left, there was no support for parents. According to the MK Social Atlas, the Estate is 90% bungalows, with many people on benefits and with low morale, and many people consider reporting problems and issues to the Council as a waste of time, either because of a perception based on experience that nothing will be done, or because they will be passed from one department to another. Tina is often able to resolve a problem locally within 24 hours where it will take the Council several weeks.

2.17 Government forms are a common problem, are hard to fill out, and many people can't read and are too embarrassed to say so. Tina encourages people to access the free adult education now available, and to sit GCSEs, but also to form self-help groups.

2.18 On one occasion, TE recorded that over 6 months, with 17 different appointments, it took 18 workmen 13 days to fix her bathroom floor. On the other hand, positive developments were taking place at community level, and greater involvement could be achieved more rapidly through a more understanding approach from the Council that helped to overcome barriers erected by officialdom.

#### Naeema Ahmad

2.19 NA said she had many relevant personal experiences, including racial and physical harassment in her home. Three reports to the Council about hinges being removed from her door produced no response; they were even reluctant to record NA's reports. Incidents escalated to cans being thrown at the house, urinating on the doorstep, hammering on the garage door

2.20 In one month the police were called 48 times, but they said they could do nothing because the perpetrators were children and because there was no proof (even though video footage was supplied, this was deemed not acceptable). Their only response was to provide a crime number.

2.21 Eventually an offer was made by the Council to re-house NA, which she declined because she feared a continuation of her problems because of the new property's location across the road from a park, and subsequently no other properties were offered. In the end, NA sought refuge in private accommodation; the night she left, the property suffered an arson attack.

2.22 NA related that she thought it was so sad that so many people who could have helped did nothing. In contrast, NA teaches racial awareness in higher education, and black and ethnic minority healthy lifestyle projects.

### **3. Discussion**

3.1 MM asked DV to give his response, in the light of the evidence given.

DV replied that there were clearly issues about interactions between agencies and failing delivery systems that are incurring costs disproportionate to discharging the task properly. The fact that nobody intervened when several appointments were made is not going to be resolved by a service transformational agenda, but by better management, more transparency and accountability and more councillors asking why they have to become involved in such issues when a competent system would ensure delivery of satisfactory services.

Evidence suggests that ~50% of the population are sceptical that complaints to the police or council will lead to any action. In the '101' experiment in Cardiff (designed to relieve the stress on incorrect usage of 999 calls), people have been surprised to find that reports have led to action. This has led to a 'virtuous circle', and a similar service in New York has led to the reshaping of public services through re-engagement with citizens. It is a problem of management capability, not service transformation.

3.2 LAK asserted that some powerful evidence had been provided by the witnesses, which was most pertinent to identifying the kinds of problems that we face. He pointed out that DV was somewhat different to Sir Peter Gershon and Sir Michael Lyons in that he had stayed on with the task of implementing the recommendations made in his review! It would be good if some of the people at the sharp end in Milton Keynes were able to access the Varney Report, as this had some relevant and powerful ideas. It was an important, long-term strategy that could make a real difference.

DV said in Sir PG's defence that he had stayed to implement the first part of the reform programme, and is still a non-executive director at the Treasury. The report was written for Whitehall and Parliament; once we began to implement the strategy, people may begin to believe we are serious. Some things have already changed – the DVLA is providing an online service but still got lots of phone calls from people asking when they'd get their licence (even though the Website said it would be 21 days), because they expected it in a week. So DVLA changed to <1week and calls dramatically dropped. Trying to get public services to work in horizontal way is a huge challenge.

The moves made in the Comprehensive Spending Review are important and in the right direction as a response to a tight spending envelope, with better value all round. We all probably recognise that getting public servants to work in a horizontal way is a huge challenge, especially considering the size of the system. Plans for rationalising websites and telephones are being implemented, and there is much more discussion about customer focus. So we have made a good start, but there is much more to do.

3.3 LAK asked if DV had looked at how they had approached this in Scotland?

DV replied that the Government was looking at one stop shops in Canada and Denmark and while we must not rush to an answer, we are running pilots. There are also many relationships with Local Government, and in order to deliver joined-up services at the local level, we will need a coherent information management system to identify people, and validate their identity - and this raises a number of issues. The change in the Pension Service to a more nationally centred organisation has been coupled with excellent customer service.

3.4 LAK pointed out that not all problems can be solved by call centres, and asked DV to review the importance of and need for face to face contact, especially where people have multiple problems that cannot be resolved through call centres.

DV pointed out that Alexis Cleveland, former CEO of the DWP, is the Director General for Service Transformation in the Civil Service in the Cabinet Office. DV did not take quite the 'romantic' view of LAK with respect to face to face service provision. In Tameside, there were in 2004/5 some 680,000 calls via self-service at a cost of 25p/transaction; 315,000 calls to call centres at a cost of £1.39/transaction, while 105,000 face to face transactions cost £14.65 each. So we want to make most efficient use of call centres and self-service, so that resources can be focused on face to face in those

cases where it is needed. In HMRC, telephones were put into face to face centres, and a 'foreman' advises on which service is best for the client

3.5 LAK asked what funding source had enabled Tameside to install their IT infrastructure? This scale of investment was unlikely to be available to other local authorities, and so the savings made through self-service are dependent on initial capital investment.

DV replied that he knew of at least one local authority that had invested in IT and acquired the capacity to service many more customers than are in its area; also, local authorities can use different configurations of back-office services, and so there is some scope for such investment and service provision.

NE commented that if you can provide face to face and self-service, a better system will be provided for all. But at every level, horizontal working is dependent on relationships, and how well people can collaborate. You need to have choices for how people interact, and while the best agency/council workers will work across the system, they are afraid to be caught! We do not have a system that rewards people for doing this. The best people therefore work by stealth (e.g., a health worker will call the gas board to get something fixed).

JW added that CA would support the need for an approach as outlined by DV (i.e. encourage online and telephone usage where appropriate); a channel strategy should be in place which allows face to face to be used to best effect.

3.6 CM asked to what extent these issues are unique to the public sector? Do people know how to decide between systems? What do we need to do to ensure that best practice is spread more quickly?

DV remarked that the public's expectations were driven by the best service they were aware of; if a service is not available from one provider, people will go elsewhere, including to the private sector. DV's report had tried to identify leading edge services in the public sector, and this, like the capability reviews introduced by Gus O'Donnell, has exerted a positive pressure on departments, similar to the performance appraisal systems in local government. A local government delivery council is helping to implement the Varney review at local level, evaluating different delivery models – in the best locations DV was typically greeted by the chief executive talking enthusiastically about their plans. .

KW referred to the universality of uniform expectations, and commented that as soon as 80% of users were able to bypass a service, two things are likely to happen. Firstly, if the middle class are unaffected by the problem, it is unlikely to be addressed, and secondly, the gap might well be widened between those who have access to a service and those that don't. Furthermore, if an office is subsequently closed as a consequence of 80%+ no longer needing it, the service is even worse for those who need it. The lesson must therefore be that any spare capacity that technology has generated must be used to ensure that those that require it most receive a better service than before. Getting the service right first time will also generate significant savings.

3.7 CM then asked how we decide how extensive the personalised responses should be. How do we ensure people can understand that home visits are more efficient and more helpful to the 10% of disadvantaged citizens than keeping an office open?

DV said he would not like to see the Barnett formula applied to house visits! In some local authorities, staff make home visits to people on pension benefits, and then provide other services, raising the issue of whether to use intermediaries, and at what point the service becomes too expensive and it becomes difficult to persuade citizens to migrate from it to a cheaper channel, or chose a cheaper channel in the first instance. This becomes a political choice.

NE added that we need to look at segmenting the market; we do not really understand the high diversity of our customers. In persuading citizens to give up smoking in a project in Alaska, the authorities succeeded in the majority of cases and saved many lives, but in the end, the gap between those who did and did not widened. This did not mean that Government had failed; but it does mean that we need to identify what did work, what didn't work and stop beating ourselves up. What is the incentive for stimulating demand for a service when it is free? Tesco wants more customers, but the local PCT has enough customers, and the better it gets at delivering services, the more money it costs. So there is a built-in incentive not to stimulate or segment the market, but to deal with the least demanding.

3.8 AM was tempted to describe DV as an optimist in view of his prediction that services would improve over the next few years. While we needed optimists to drive the programme, the examples given to illustrate progress are familiar to almost every civil servant and local councillor. Even in those departments which have a good reputation for service delivery (e.g. the Pensions Service), AM knew of people who had had bad experiences. From his experience of government, things had always been good and bad, and leaders had always believed they were driving change.

His question therefore was how much of the service delivery environment was about structures, systems, culture or individual attitude? The latter two can transform situations even with poor systems and structures, but getting all four of these to focus on the needs of the individual and the service ethic is necessary for real progress. How do we achieve this?

KW agreed that culture was very important, but how can we incentivise it? There are many examples where people have gone beyond the call of duty, often at risk to themselves, but it does not help meet Performance Indicator targets. Individuals do make a difference, as in the case of TE-S planting bulbs in her ward, not as a part of the system, but as an individual act beyond what was required. Such acts generate community engagement and a feeling of well-being that unintentionally may lead to savings.

DV agreed; there are areas where the agencies are doing well, as well as areas where they are not, but talking about good news helps motivate people. In HMRC, DV used a process called 'LEAN' to introduce more customer focused services that could add value and remove waste. This involved front-line staff looking at existing processes, and resulted in significant improvements in quality, lead times and productivity. The incentive scheme was unchanged, but the way people are managed and involved in the delivery process was. Civil servants and local authority staff are responding positively to the challenge of being more customer-focused in similar schemes across government, and linking up across agencies. People will live down to our fears rather than up to our hopes unless they have the right motivation.

3.9 MH remarked that he had been familiar with the LEAN process for some 20 years; we need to understand the processes by which we reach out to people locally, and then how we use technology to assist those processes. But such an analysis will reveal a host of organisational dysfunctions, whether they are automated or not. Using the telecoms analogy of unbundling the local loop or final mile, opening up the infrastructure to competition, in the case of service delivery, we are looking at actually bundling this: how can we find a way to deliver for the customer across multiple services locally and quickly?

MH referred to how we might reach the excluded via mobile phones, which outnumber the population of the UK. How far can we assume that this is a technology everyone can use? It might be easier to give people a personal device of their own, where the capital outlay will result in future savings. Thus a pager with an explanatory note given to the lady who does not answer her door could save numerous unnecessary visits. The pager is also recoverable.

Paging or texting in advance to confirm an appointment would also save unnecessary waiting and waste, whilst ensuring that all relevant information was available to the service provider. Such readily-deployed technology-supported measures do not require an expensive overarching system and would make dramatic savings on the cost of service provision, and a rapid ROI. The question is how to encourage local, decentralised activity and think in innovative ways.

NE affirmed that many organisations are using SMS now to confirm appointments. ME asked so can we assume that most people have access to mobile phones?

TE-S referred to the 'benefits bus' that visits the estate, with the different agencies on board, to help customers; this has the advantage of getting them out of their homes to discuss their problems. A frustration was the number of 'tick-box' surveys that provided no feedback.

3.10 DV agreed that insufficient use was made of SMS, though there are some good examples in the public sector. There are also more internet browsers on mobile phones than there are on desk-tops, and the capacity is increasing. The question then is how user-friendly can the phones be made.

Regarding unbundling, government has unbundled the citizen's problems into a series of silos that do not solve the problem. We need to start to address the issue by asking 'what is the problem that the

citizen is trying to solve?' But underlying this are some difficult issues about identity management, because the more you identify between agencies, the more you have to share the validation of whom you are dealing with, especially with regard to benefits. We therefore need an identity management framework that assures people that information held and verified by one part of government can be trusted by other parts. There is a secondary debate about what mechanism can best ensure this.

3.11 DH referred to the general need for joined-up governance and interconnectivity, and the associated, long-standing and difficult issues of data sharing, and the need for a common infrastructure and secure network across government. Move towards this include GSi, PNN, Government Connect, but these are not joined together. The 'tell us once' concept originated 10 years ago in the e-Government debate, but we have hardly advanced this. So what needs to be done around these core issues of joining up data on a secure infrastructure that enables information about the individual to be used to enable citizen-focused service delivery, especially for those most in need?

DV replied that the first step is to ensure that we have the power and capacity to do this; we need to be clear about the barriers to sharing, including behavioural barriers where people think that are unable to share information. A Cabinet Committee is looking at this. Government Connect is intended to provide a common infrastructure and secure network, but one point for consideration is that it is expensive and technically challenging for all data to be held within a secure environment. We thus need to ask if it is necessary for all that information to be held there.

JW commented that in the '90s, CA was funded to upgrade their IT and work on a programme called Citizens Connect, to develop a virtual private network to connect the CA service via the back office to local authority networks to work with them on monitoring transactions and progress, such as a client with a housing benefit query. The main difficulties CA experienced were 'attitudinal', and only one instance of a successful liaison has survived – with Woking Council. Experience suggests that the attitude problem may stem from an 'us and them' perspective.

NA added that when professionals (e.g. the police, council staff) are asked for help, if it is not in their remit, they will generally not advise on where the citizen should go, or what they should do. But at the local centre in Woughton Ward, people will always try to help and advise on where to go, in a friendly and compassionate way. This is an essential aspect of public service that is often sadly lacking.

3.12 PD thanked the witnesses for providing the opportunity to have this type of discussion that cuts across organisations - usually this type of discussion is about silos. PD also congratulated DV on his report, which highlighted a lot of best practice – the challenge is now to make that work across the country. The Worcestershire Hub includes a former police station converted into a multi-agency one-stop-shop where the three local authority tiers and the police share a front counter, with JobcentrePlus in the same building – a successful model which could be adopted throughout the country.

PD said it was important to retain face to face contact centres, because technology was not a universal solution: not everyone knows how to use, or has access to, SMS, so we cannot imagine that the glories of technology will solve the challenges for many years to come. Regarding online self-assessment forms from HMRC, and the use of contact centres and helplines, 2 years ago, 3 out of every 4 calls to HMRC failed to be answered (10 years after they were introduced), suggesting that lessons have to be learned generally before new technologies will be accepted by the general public.

How can you serve sparsely populated communities where access to technologies, e.g. broadband, is limited? How do you deal with simplicity – over half of HMRC forms fail the 'SMOG' (special measure of gobbledegook) test - i.e. are incomprehensible to normal people.

DV responded with an illustration of the preferred means of contacting the Samaritans by people needing their help. In a review, face to face was the least popular channel, while SMS was the most popular, causing the Samaritans to switch to SMS as their main channel for communication. More can be done with SMS, but prior research is needed.

Regarding contact centres, the Cabinet Office website has a best practice guide to call-centre management, we are looking at an information system which will report all of the call centres across central government, and these metrics will be available to others. The Metropolitan Police have revolutionised their call centres from 67 to 3 that are interconnected, while HMRC Bathgate Contact Centre won the Judges Special Award in the European Contact Centres competition for their delivery of an exceptional level of customer focus. HMRC also won Contact Centre Manager of the Year,

beating competition from Yorkshire Water, Norwich Union Direct and several other private sector organisations.

DV agreed about the problem of forms, and had initiated an investigation into these under the LEAN process. Problems can often be traced to a small number of forms that no-one understands apart from the person who wrote it – this is a management challenge. Regarding rural areas, there are examples of councils who have invested in video appointments; other strategies involve visiting library buses.

3.13 NE pointed out the distinction between services which respond to citizen demand, and services that protect and support individuals. It is the latter that suffers from the problem of information sharing. Disadvantaged communities typically experience significant Government intrusion into their affairs. NE's work experience suggested that most people think and expect that the State knows everything about them, although they have no notion of which departments or agencies might have this information.

There is massive information sharing on an informal basis that is positively dangerous, because professionals chat to each other - sometimes in completely inappropriate ways that are highly disrespectful and often highly inaccurate. The benefit of written personal data is that it can be shown to the person, requiring more care and judgement. The human rights issues around data sharing can be attributed in large part to the 'Guardian reader' liberal intelligentsia who are in effect denying the most disadvantaged in our society the kinds of services that they could get, were it possible to share information appropriately.

3.14 TB raised concerns about information management. Most of us like the DVLA system, because it is simple, convenient and quick; however, DVLA get to know who a driver's insurance company is.

Government silos cannot deal with multiple needs. Every year, huge numbers of people change their job, their residence etc. which has a massive impact on agencies like CSA, DWP etc. The people responsible for devising tax credits do not appear to understand the situation of a family who's money runs out before the next 'pay' day, living week to week. How much can the policy/Whitehall culture take into account the complex society we have? How can you successfully make an inroad to the process on behalf of the socially excluded? Can you tailor policies for them?

KW wondered if there is a need for personal advocates/advisors, especially in children's services, but also for others who are most socially excluded? KW doubted that Social Services alone could ever deliver for these people. Upskilling the community must be a top priority if we are to achieve social inclusion. We also need to recognize that the route to accessing services will be different for different people with different needs, and service provision must be structured to deal with this. People are also scared of giving information to the public sector, and how their information might be shared.

3.15 JW was concerned about the amount of personal and financial data that was involved in online transactions. Moreover, financial loss might be incurred if transactions were not conducted online – e.g. when people switch utility suppliers. The CA 'ATM campaign' attempted to ensure that socially excluded people do not have to pay for the use of ATMs. In fact, social exclusion seems to add to the cost of people's lives. Other parts of Government like UK Online centres could be joined up to ensure that capacity building can enable a community to access non-domestic internet resources.

IT education classes are taking place in schools as an example of what might be done at community level; the answers are all there, it's just about joining them together. When asking how can input from socially excluded groups be used to tailor policy, the key is to talk to people, look at the data and don't make assumptions: if the data is not there, get it. Although texts can be helpful, when people are in real difficulty, they need to talk to agencies face to face.

3.16 EofE remarked that most of the system actually works, otherwise Government would not be running! Perhaps it runs less efficiently than it could, but with greater efficiency may come greater complexity and greater risk of failure, especially in a rules-based system. Using principles, it is possible to make judgments, but it's impossible to make a rule for every single permutation of human circumstance.

People change and may move in and out of social exclusion. But the middle classes are most afraid of dealing with public services when they run into unusual hard times, because of the risk of minor

misdemeanours being exposed (e.g. forgetting to notify DVLA of change of address within one month, which carries a significant fine).

Is there a problem in linking up government departments that act as enforcers (e.g. HMRC) with those that are seen as helpers (e.g. DWP)? EofE considered that there would be a problem when connecting up such departments for purposes of efficiency or fighting fraud, if there were human casualties that resulted, and this became tabloid headlines.

DV replied that cooperation between HMRC and DWP and other agencies was necessary for fighting and preventing fraud. Looking at systems in the private sector, there is the advantage of a common system in relation to e.g. credit cards which provides the individual with a tailored service. DV believed that the hegemony of policy makers in Whitehall was being challenged by professionalizing the civil service and ensuring people had delivery skills, and by improved use of data related to operational activity. More credible data means better understanding of the customer and the products wanted.

The new Cabinet Committee on public engagement and service delivery is so-called because it is focused on just those aspects. We do not want to end up with a generation that is even more dependent on the State.

3.17 LAK asked if a member of the panel had one wish, how would they better improve public services?

TE-S wanted someone at ground level who knows and understands people, and can help them to access services, fill in forms etc.

NA opted for face to face contact - with a smile on the face of the helper.

3.18 MM closed the hearing and thanked everyone for their input.