Attitudes to eGovernment

Dr Andy Phippen

Network Research Group, University of Plymouth

andy@jack.see.plymouth.ac.uk

Overview

- Where I'm coming from
- Review eGovernment at a Local Authority level in the UK
- Anecdotal evidence from the South West
- Initial measurement of local authority and citizens attitudes in North Cornwall
- What next?

Where I'm coming from

- eGovernment research by accident
- Research into community use of the Internet
  - Addressing social exclusion
  - Bottom up/inclusive design of social networks
  - Virtual community to underpin local community / community empowerment
- The more work that was done, the closer we got to local eGovernment

eGovernment

- Reflecting worldwide moves toward the delivery of government services online
- In the UK, local government strategy is driven by Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM)
  - Priority outcomes
  - All services in place by end 2005
- Beyond basic internet information resources
  - CRM, Document Management, Payment Portals

Local eGov "Opportunities"

- Wider participation/reduced social exclusion

- Improvements in information sharing between services and agencies

- Greater variety, choice and convenience of access for customers

- Improved speed and efficiency of the processes which underpin services

Anecdotally…

- The further west you go, the more negative it gets!
- Community opinion
  - Attitudes to local authority involvement
- Examining concepts of community engagement by local authorities in Devon and Cornwall
  - The town hall approach
  - The community engagement approach
- Variability in terms of attitude for
  - The value of eGovernment
  - The delivery of eGovernment

Some observations

- Most authorities have invested in serious CM systems to implement their eGov outcomes

- Broadband initiatives such as ActNow and BB4D have increased citizen awareness of the internet and its potential

- Technically things are in place to deliver effective services

Measurement in North Cornwall

- Local authority – major stakeholders in eGov service delivery
  - 20 service heads were surveyed
  - Interview with eGovernment "champion"
- Surveyed regarding attitudes toward eGovernment and also community responsibility

Local authority attitude – delivering eGov

- "Modernising local government is about enhancing local services and the effectiveness of local democracy"
  - *55% strongly agreed, 45% agreed*
- "Our website is easy to use and community focussed"
  - *60% strongly agreed, 40% agreed*
- "ICT provides the opportunity to combat social and economic isolation in rural communities"
  - *20% strongly agreed, 70% agreed, 10% no opinion*

Local authority attitude – engaging the community

- "The eGov outcomes are an opportunity to improve relationships with local communities"
  - *20% strongly agreed, 50% agreed, 30% no opinion*
- "It is the responsibility of the local authority to provide any community wishing to have an online presence with the resource to achieve this"
  - *5% strongly agreed, 30% agreed, 25% no opinion, 40% disagreed*

Local authority attitude – engaging the community

- "Local communities want eGovernment style service"
  - *10% strongly agreed, 15% agreed, 55% no opinion, 20% disagreed*
- **"Local communities have the requisite knowledge and resources to exploit eGovernment services"**
  - *5% strongly agreed, 10% agreed, 10% no opinion, 75% disagreed*

Considering the findings

- Local authorities are very clear in what they need to achieve, and think it's a good idea BUT
  - Does this still demonstrate an element of "ticking the boxes"?
  - Do they know/have they considered what the citizens want?
  - Do they know how to engage the citizens?

The citizen viewpoint

- A web based survey in North Cornwall disseminated via email and newsgroups ~ 500 people
- Only people online, with email were surveyed
  - Internet aware sample
- Not a random sample in the NC area, but we are not trying to generalise from the results
  - Indicative/informative study
- Low response rate (50) suggests level of interest in eGov?

The citizen viewpoint – using ICT

- "ICT can be used to address problems of exclusion in rural communities"
  - *16% strongly agreed, 68% agreed, 16% disagreed*
- "Broadband access is an essential element of ICT in addressing issues of exclusion"
  - *54% strongly agreed, 30% agreed, 16% disagreed*

- Established no general negativity toward ICT

The citizen viewpoint – local government

- "Within my community, there is a strong demand for information services from local government"

  - *8% strongly agreed, 36% agreed, 32% no opinion, 24% disagreed*

- "People are more likely to use a service provided by a member of their own community than an outsider"

  - *28% strongly agreed, 32% agreed, 24% no opinion, 16% disagreed*

The citizen viewpoint – engaging eGovernment

- "My community is not aware of the range of internet based information services offered by local government"
  - *36% strongly agreed, 40% agreed, 18% no opinion, 6% disagreed*
- "Local government internet services are easily accessible and simple to use"
  - *12% strongly agreed, 28% agreed, 22% no opinion, 38% disagreed*

Significant indicators

- ICT is considered a good thing
  - Expected from an Internet aware population
- It is unclear whether citizens want eGovernment
- Local authorities are not promoting their eGov services
- There is evidence of a negativity toward local authority in general

What next?

- For local authorities
  - Spent the last 18 months getting to grips with the technologies
  - "The best thing they could do is get rid of the 'e'" (PCC, last week)
  - eGov tied into the next 10 year strategy on local government
  - Engagement is crucial but how?

NCDC "Community Information Line"

- An ODPM funded project into citizen engagement in North Cornwall area

- Take eGov services to the community

- Some technical problems ☺

- Gradual increased interest in some areas of North Cornwall*

- Communication and information still an issue

Where is this work going?

- Providing evaluative data for North Cornwall and Plymouth City Council's future eGov strategy

- Feeding into the bigger picture
  - BCS ST group eDemocracy work

- Further study