

# REPORTER

The electronic magazine of the United Kingdom ACE Association



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# Eye opener edition

Northern Ireland has been undergoing a quiet revolution. A return to devolved government has led to increased expectations on the public sector. Tough decisions are required on sensitive topics from the past – not least when and how criminal justice matters will be devolved – and on 'normal' political matters such as the future of educational selection at 11.

Public servants are working more closely with Ministers and those Ministers are passionate about making a difference. At the same time, all Departments and Agencies are facing tight budget settlements, and many are facing significant change through merger and rationalisation.

Einstein had it that 'in the middle of every difficulty lies opportunity'. All of this change requires a step change in ways of working – tightening belts will no longer suffice. Public servants across the UK – not least in ACE member organisations – are stepping up to the challenges that differ but yet have

common elements across the devolved and central administrations.

In this edition of ACE Reporter are stories that have common elements of joining up and of innovation – whoever thought that sheep's eyeballs would make it into ACE Reporter! All the articles continue to prove the bodies that ACE represents are showing ingenuity, innovation – and sheer hard work – to deliver on expectations.

Maybe some of us are too often caught in the middle of it to realise and reflect on how much is being delivered around us. I hope you will find a little time to read some of the articles. There is news, too, of ACE Events, including our annual drinks reception in September – yet another opportunity to learn from each other and enjoy a pleasant evening at the same time.



**Guest Editor**  
**Iain Greenway**  
**Chief Survey Officer Land & Property Services**

# Battle to beat sheep rustling



Retinal scanning of sheep is being used in the battle against sheep rustling in Northern Ireland. The Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI), in conjunction with the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), is currently employing retinal imaging of sheep as a deterrent against theft.

In a project funded by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, AFBI has developed and evaluated biometric methods for the identification of sheep and cattle, including retinal scanning and DNA profiling. It has carried out this research on retinal imaging

in collaboration with Optibrand, a company based in the United States, that has designed and produced a unique system for retinal imaging of livestock.

The technology enables the rapid on-farm capture of a digital picture of the back of an animal's eye (retina). The image consists of a tree-like branching pattern of blood vessels that is unique to each individual animal – much like a human fingerprint. The handheld camera used in this process is linked to a Global Positioning System (GPS) that records

the precise geographical location of the farm on which the images have been recorded. The retinal image and associated details, such as the name of the flock (or herd) owner and individual ear tag number, are then downloaded and held in a central database.

When sheep suspected of having been stolen are relocated, the technology can rapidly compare their retinal images with those previously stored in the central database. Any matches can be linked to the farm of origin, permitting return to their owner and facilitating prosecution if necessary.

Implementation of this technology in the Glens of Antrim over the last year has resulted in much publicity and the award of a PSNI Community Policing Award. The scheme is also an entrant in the UK National Tilley awards that reward innovative methods of crime prevention.

● AFBI's retinal imaging and DNA profiling technology can help livestock owners and commercial organisations improve the traceability of animals and food products. More information from AFBI's traceability unit on (028) 90519424. or by email to: [info@afbini.gov.uk](mailto:info@afbini.gov.uk)

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# Does public service advertising work?

The effectiveness, or not, of 25 years of public sector advertising campaigns comes under scrutiny in a new book, *How Public Service Advertising Works*.

The book looks at the aim of public service campaigns and how target audiences are identified and engaged, together with the creative processes and psychology behind them. A key finding is that there is no single public service methodology.

Alan Bishop, CEO of the Central Office of Information (COI), said: 'The book demonstrates that public service advertising can successfully initiate positive behaviour change, reduce negative behaviour, and encourage law-abiding behaviour in citizens.'

As the UK's third biggest spender in the advertising world, COI takes advertising very seriously, which is why it teamed up with the Institute for Practitioners in Advertising, the leading trade and professional body for advertising, media and marketing communications agencies, to publish the book.

'Unlike much consumer marketing activity, public sector communication aims to fundamentally change behaviour.



'The book demonstrates that public service advertising can successfully initiate positive behaviour change' – Alan Bishop



COI works with government departments and agencies to deliver information campaigns that affect the lives of every citizen – from health and education to benefits, rights and welfare,' said Bishop.

'Ultimately, the book puts forward evidence that shows public sector advertising has been a truly efficient form of investment. It points to tangible returns on advertising spend, tens of thousands of lives saved, and considerable sums of money retained in the economy.'

COI deputy CEO Peter Buchanan, who helped make the original concept a reality, said: 'This text provides 25 years of learning that will inform the next 25 years of public sector advertising campaigns. It is a unique

source of reference for public sector marketers, their agencies, academics and students.'

The book, edited by marketing and research consultant Judie Lannon, includes a collection of commentaries from high profile players in the advertising industry, academics and the media on winning advertising effectiveness campaigns.

Advertising Association CEO Baroness Peta Buscombe said: 'It is a fantastic analysis of best practice in achieving behavioural change through the positive power of advertising and communications.'

● For more information or to get a copy of *How Public Service Advertising Works* visit [www.coi.gov.uk](http://www.coi.gov.uk)

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# Huge project goes live

One of the UK's largest building societies is using Land Registry's first e-conveyancing service. Coventry Building Society has implemented the first in a suite of e-conveyance services from Land Registry that allows them to remove a legal mortgage charge from the Land Register automatically. The technology reduces the need for expensive secure deeds storage, automates process intensive paper-based tasks and reduces the risk of fraud.

Land Registry head of product development Eddie Davies said: 'In a market of ever increasing uncertainty and the need for more stringent risk management procedures, many financial organisations require the comfort of knowing their interests are protected. Land Registry, through the implementation of this project, has provided Coventry Building Society with real-time assurance that their interests and those of their customers are protected.'

'This has been a huge project in more ways than one. It shows we are successfully moving forward with e-conveyancing that offers greater security and better customer



The striking headquarters of Land Registry in London

satisfaction. It brings environmental benefits and cost savings that can be redeployed to improve other public services.'

## How the system works

The Electronic Discharge (ED) and Data Synchronisation (Data Sync) message process is conducted across a secure Virtual Private Network link between the lender and Land Registry. EDs and Data Sync messages are encrypted and digitally certified. Once the lender has received

cleared mortgage funds and updated its own records, the Land Register is automatically updated within seconds.

Daily updates of new charges, together with confirmation of discharges are electronically sent to the lender in the form of Data Sync messages. This ensures the two databases remain synchronised making electronic discharges possible.

● For more information email:  
[eddie.davies@landregistry.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:eddie.davies@landregistry.gsi.gov.uk)

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# Overseas expansion for VCA

New offices in Italy and Australia are being opened by the Vehicle Certification Agency (VCA), the UK's national approval authority for new road vehicles, agricultural tractors and off-road vehicles. It is also in negotiations with Turkey and has its eye on Russia.

Overseas expansion is inevitable for the VCA, says its CEX Paul Markwick. 'We do not get any money from UK government. We work entirely commercially, competing with other European Government bodies and private sector companies, in line with the European framework.

'We have been supporting the automotive industry with testing and certification services since the early 1970s and in that time there have been major changes in the landscape. Most significantly, increased globalisation and the emergence of countries such as China and India.

'This sort of change doesn't happen in a vacuum, and as a supplier to the industry, we too have had to adapt to this changing environment. Customers tell us that they need us to be at their elbow, providing a responsive and cost-effective service. This has, effectively, led to the birth of our overseas expansion strategy.'

VCA USA opened in the early 1990s followed

by Japan, Malaysia, China and India. This is a significant year too. By the end of July 2008, VCA will have opened offices in both Italy and Australia. It also hopes to have finalised arrangements with a partner in Turkey.

## 'Arguably our biggest achievement has been setting up an operation in China'

The Italy office was launched in June at the Milan offices of the British Consulate. 'This proved to be an excellent venue and turned out to be a model of cross-government cooperation, with Consulate staff and the UK Trade & Industry Department providing a great level of support,' said Markwick. The Australian office opens in Melbourne in July. It has, again, been well supported by local and national governments alike.

'Establishing an office overseas is big step and a great deal of research is done to support any

decision we make. To date our choices have turned out to be sound. Arguably our biggest achievement has been setting up an operation in China.

'It brings into sharp focus the fact that this doesn't only give us an opportunity to support existing customers but also to add value with fledgling Chinese exporters by helping them to understand the complexities of the European certification processes. Through this process, our aim is to get better products to UK and European citizens.

'Historically, quality has been something of an issue but we have been able to stress the importance of robust processes at the heart of delivering high quality in manufacturing.' Looking forward, we will continue to react to the needs of customers while carrying out our own work to evaluate potential new markets. We are currently looking at the central European accession states, and further east into Russia, where there is major investment in automotive manufacturing. We will need to be there soon.'

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# Back to work success

Helping people back to work after personal or medical difficulties has won the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) North Wales a diversity award. VOA North Wales has worked in partnership with local charity Agoriad to offer short-term placements to help people with disadvantage achieve independence through employment.

Through Agoriad, both Bangor and Wrexham offices have accommodated people on short-term placements on the Work Preparation scheme. A number of these placements have been extended through the Workstep scheme, supported by Job Centre Plus. Several placements have gone on to casual jobs in North Wales, employed by the VOA for specific tasks.

David Hughes, Business Manager, VOA North Wales, said: 'All the people who have been on placements have benefited from their experience at the VOA. They all say they have been made to feel very welcome by staff, a factor that has contributed to their gaining confidence in the work place.'

VOA was nominated for the national Wales Job Centre Plus Diversity Awards by Agoriad.

It won the Public/Voluntary sector award for its work in promoting diversity in the workplace.

Along with other employers in North Wales, Jobcentre Plus staff staged an award evening to engage with all the employers in focusing on diversity issues through The All Inclusive Dining Club. The aim was to create a different way for senior personnel to value diversity and manage inclusion in their organisations over an evening meal.

## It worked for me

Richard Lewis was given 30-days work placement with VOA Bangor. At the start he doubted his ability to be able to manage and was very nervous. He needn't have worried. After his 30 days he was offered a series of contracts before being taken on as a full-time casual in June 2007.

'From day one, I realised that there was nothing to

be nervous about. The managers and the staff made me feel at home straight away. I joined the Data Team. When the team was given training I was included and made to feel an important part of the team.

'Each day I was given a variety of tasks and I soon found I was able to cope with almost everything required of me. I have been on the payroll nearly a year at the end of June 2008. It has been, and still is, a privilege to work with such a wonderful and friendly team. I now carry out my work confidently with enthusiasm and determination.'



David Hughes and Customer Services Manager Nicola Thomas receive the award from Graham Godfrey of Job Centre Plus

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# Learn as you go

Every year the Fire Service College provides training for thousands of students from Fire and Rescue Services in the UK and abroad, as well as for other emergency service providers and Government agencies.

Training sometimes requires that learners spend several weeks away from their own fire and rescue services.

A new system that enables people to go online to monitor, track and conduct their own learning and development has been

introduced by the College to support more flexible ways of providing training. FireLearn manages all learning activities at the College and enables the development and delivery of e-learning.

Learners can: view the course directory; access personalised web-pages with information and content of their courses; undertake pre-course learning; complete pre- and post-course assessments; view their learning history; and participate in secure

online communities of practice.

Gill Newton, CEX, said: 'FireLearn enables the College to meet the needs of the UK fire and rescue services by providing quality learning and development in a more flexible way that reduces the amount of time learners have to spend away from the fire and rescue service.

'It demonstrates the college's commitment and ability to meet all of the training and development needs of Fire and Rescue Services. It further enhances the excellent support we provide for them and individual learners and enables us to provide opportunities for our learners to benefit from life-long learning rather than just physically attending courses on site.'

Facilities at the Fire Service College, at Moreton in Marsh, Gloucestershire, are unparalleled and ideally suited to provide first class practical training courses for fire-fighters and fire officers across a range of operational disciplines – such as incident command, dealing with hazardous materials, and urban search and rescue, and other specialist training needs.

The Fire Service College offers tuition from specialist teaching staff, complemented by the skills and experience of seconded fire officers from all over the UK.

● Find out more about *FireLearn* visit the Fire Service College website and follow the link: <http://www.fireservicecollege.ac.uk>



Learning online

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# ACE Diary Dates

## Ceeney is 'ace' speaker

ACE management board member Natalie Ceeney, CEX The National Archives, is one of the keynote speakers at the SOLACE Strategic Information Management Conference on Friday 18 July. Ceeney (guest editor for October ACE Reporter) is joining a line-up of top names at this new event organised by SOLACE around data and information management, the subject of intense media scrutiny in recent months. The one-day conference is being hosted by BT in their futuristic auditorium close to St. Paul's, London. Find out more at: [www.solace.org.uk/infomgmt](http://www.solace.org.uk/infomgmt)

## ACE 'not just drinks' reception

ACE is introducing a new format to its Early Evening Drinks reception. It is inviting heavyweight Government speakers to discuss the key issues facing ACE. The intention is to give a business focus to the evening with a good opportunity for both Q&As and networking.

Jane Platt, CEX National Savings and Investment, said: 'The aim is to give members the opportunity to talk openly with leading

Natalie Ceeney, CEX  
The National Archives,  
will be a keynote  
speaker at a SOLACE  
conference

speakers about issues they are facing or worried about. The plan is for the first hour to be dedicated to short presentations by a couple of top Government speakers followed by discussion forums. We will then spend the second hour networking. Occasions like this are invaluable for an organisation like ours that relies on its networking opportunities.'

ACE Early Evening Drinks Reception will be held on Wednesday 10 September at One Great George Street, the Institute of Civil Engineers, London. It will run from 6.30 till 9pm with discussion forum, drinks and canapés.

More information from James Jeynes, Head of ACE Secretariat. Email: [james.jeynes@ace.gov.uk](mailto:james.jeynes@ace.gov.uk)

## Conference date

Delivering in the Public Eye is the theme for this year's ACE annual conference. The conference, that will be held at the National School of Government, Sunningdale Park, Ascot, includes the Association's AGM. The date is Thursday and Friday, 27/28 November. Make sure you book the date now.



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# Driving green initiatives

## Encouraging wildlife is part of green measures introduced at DSA

Some 50 trees and 850 shrubs, designed to support a variety of wildlife, are helping to drive through a raft of 'green' initiatives at the Driving Standards Agency (DSA). The trees and shrubs have been planted at the DSA's site at Cardington, Bedford – just one of the Agency's 450 test centres – as a result of the DSA's commitment to biodiversity.

A review of DSA facilities, environmental impact and opportunities for improvement, resulted in the Agency's first Sustainable Development Action Plan being published last summer. It contained 38 discrete commitments ranging from encouraging fuel efficient driving to making new test centre buildings more energy efficient.

DSA CEX Rosemary Thew said: 'Sustainability is a hot topic within the Civil Service. It has been identified as one of four key targets for

'Green' responsibilities are formally recognised for those responsible for running the estate and the DSA plans to spread this to other key functions in 2008-09



department heads for the current financial year. But even before this, DSA had recognised sustainability as an important priority. We have appointed a dedicated member of staff, who has established a specialist team to drive green initiatives forward.'

Significant achievements include the Multi-Purpose Test Centre (MPTC) programme that

provides modern facilities for candidates, instructors and examiners. The centres have been designed to include an off-road area for testing of manoeuvres required as part of the new test to be introduced in September 2008. All new buildings constructed from late 2007

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feature energy efficiency measures including triple glazing, natural ventilation, photo thermal hot water and sun pipes.

When the DSA moved HQ in March 2008, it cut down from more than 100 printers and faxes to about 10 multi-functional devices. It reduced waste and increased recycling through communal segregated recycling points and the removal of personal bins and it worked with suppliers to ensure responsible sourcing for the workstations and fit-out.

The DSA introduced sustainability commitments into its business plan for 2008-09, as well as targets to reduce consumption. It has committed to achieving ISO 14001 accreditation for its HQ Environmental Management System. It has set up a group to take ownership of, monitor and progress, SD initiatives that reports monthly to the Operational Performance Group.

'Green' responsibilities are formally recognised for those responsible for running the estate and the DSA plans to spread this to other key functions in 2008-09.

Thew said: 'We are very proud of our

'There are many challenges ahead but I am really encouraged by what we have achieved so far. I am confident that sustainability is embedded in our thinking as we look to the future'

achievements so far but we recognise we need a concerted effort across Government if we are to make a real difference and lead the way in this important field. We have taken a leading role within the Department for Transport on cross-departmental initiatives.'

DfT cross-department initiatives include the Greenfleet Review, relating to owned, leased and hired vehicles; embedding green thinking into Work Related Road Safety Policy and Travel & Subsistence Codes; the Carbon Management Programme, focusing on emissions, and Sustainable Procurement.

Sustainability projects for the future at DSA include: selecting and training representatives to lead on sustainability within their departments; balancing new learning and

testing processes against social, economic and environmental considerations, including embedding Eco-Safe Driving; improving the DSA estate while ensuring sustainability and improving water efficiency; and working towards DSA being carbon neutral by 2012.

Thew said: 'There are many challenges ahead but I am really encouraged by what we have achieved so far. I am confident that sustainability is embedded in our thinking as we look to the future.'

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# Flood plan comes together

## New initiative can't make UK flood-proof but it can reduce the risks

With more than two million homes at risk from coastal or inland flooding and more than £230 billion of assets sited on flood plains in England and Wales, flood planning is a vital task, says James Brayshaw, Ordnance Survey Director and chair of a new initiative designed to provide a joined-up approach to flood management.

The Atlantis Initiative is being run jointly by Ordnance Survey, British Geological Survey, Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, Environment Agency, Met Office and UK Hydrographic Office. The project team estimates that it will be a huge benefit to the many organisations that can spend between 25%-50% of their time sourcing relevant information and getting different datasets to work together, often after an emergency has occurred.

Sir Michael Pitt, whose report on the summer 2007 floods has just been published, is supporting the project. He said: 'The floods of June and July 2007 were a wake-up call to us all. Atlantis is an excellent example of public sector organisations joining forces to share geographic and related information. It will help ensure people have access to the geographic information they need to plan for, and respond to, these types of emergencies.'

The project aims to provide agreed standards for more effective use and integration of existing geographic and environmental data. By improving flood modelling and forecasting, Atlantis enables a consistent and joined-up approach in all aspects of the flooding life cycle – from planning and response through to recovery.

The Atlantis initiative came under debate at a recent conference hosted by the Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE). Peter Bungard, CEX Gloucestershire County Council, said: 'Witnessing first-hand the total disruption of the way we live and temporary economic collapse due to flooding is an experience I will never forget. We

can't make the UK flood-proof, but we can take steps to reduce risk. Knowing how water will behave both in terms of rainfall and flow across the ground is a critical starting point, and brings into focus the significance of the Atlantis Initiative.'

James Brayshaw said: 'The collaboration of the six organisations will improve the accuracy of the information available to engineers and scientists for all aspects of flooding, in particular how we can use the latest information to model flood risk, identify and protect critical infrastructure and provide better information for responders.'

ICE Director General Tom Foulkes said: 'Initiatives like Atlantis are essential in bringing together engineers and government officials to work on evaluating and improving flood-risk management.'

Other issues discussed at the conference were the emergence of the Environment Agency's Detailed River Network and the availability of Ordnance Survey topography and height data, critical for flood planning.

● More information at:  
[www.projectatlantis.net](http://www.projectatlantis.net)

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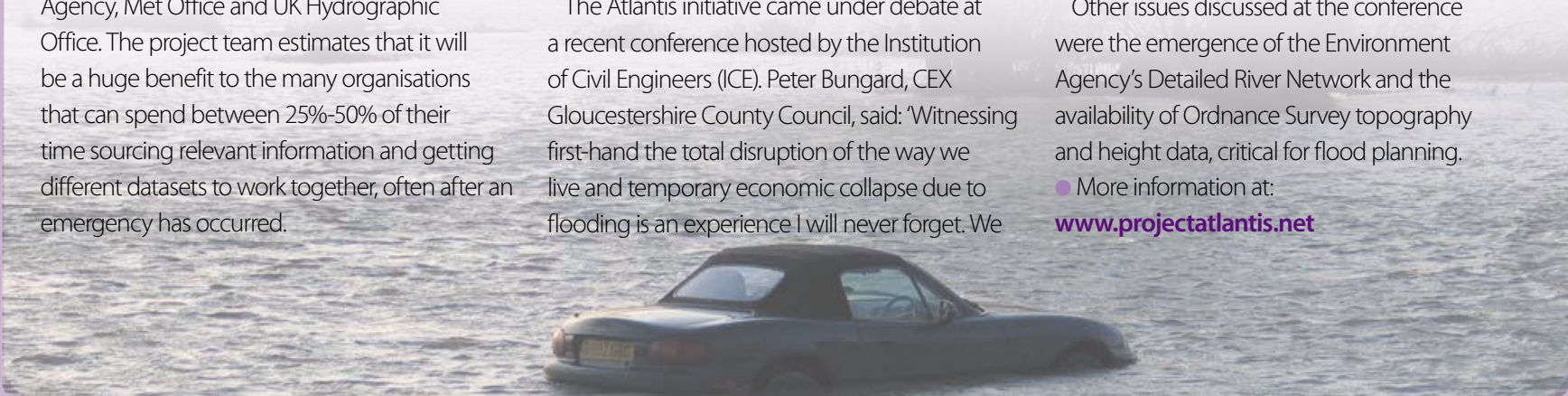
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Four Government agencies in Northern Ireland have come together in a new joint agency. In two reports, **Iain Greenway**, Guest Editor of ACE Reporter and Chief Survey Officer of the new Land & Property Services, looks ahead and celebrates the past

# It's Hello to high expectations -

The new Northern Ireland integrated set of land and property related services for citizens and government, Land & Property Services (LPS), faces high expectations. With £1 billion of rates collectable each year, the only source of taxation that Northern Ireland politicians can control, it is very much in the public eye. It employs just over 1,000 staff.

LPS has been created from the merger of the Rate Collection Agency, Valuation and Lands Agency, Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland and Land Registers Northern Ireland. With four Agencies came four legacy sets of data, and the joining up of this data into a Data Spine is a high priority for the organisation.

A recent trawl showed unique references for 4.1 million properties in the combined organisation – yet there are only around 800,000 properties in Northern Ireland. An exercise is nearing completion to match

addresses across LPS. A first run of the process matched 600,000 addresses – a number that has now risen to 740,000. The remaining addresses include the expected complex areas, vanity addresses, industrial estates, and County Fermanagh, that largely uses individual names, Townland (an Irish equivalent of parish) and county as the postal address.

Determining the definitive address for each property is the responsibility of local authorities, so LPS staff have been out on the ground with relevant local government officials, ensuring that addresses are agreed and then officially ratified before being recorded in the definitive Pointer address dataset for Northern Ireland maintained by LPS.

The link with local authorities is crucial for LPS' valuation functions. Traditionally, data on the commencement of building work had

flowed from the 26 authorities – inevitably in 26 different formats and with 26 different sets of codes. LPS has sourced e-government fund money for local authorities to upgrade their systems, so that the data flows through, validated, in a single format and using a single set of codes.

The link with local authorities has moved further in the Belfast City Council area, where all new developments are now measured and photographed for valuation purposes by building control staff, and supplied to LPS. Northern Ireland uses a capital value system for domestic rating purposes, with each house individually valued, not council tax bandings as are used in the rest of the UK.

Data flows in a more timely manner, at a significantly reduced cost. LPS pays Belfast CC

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# It's Hello to high expectations -

the marginal cost of collecting the additional data required for valuation. Developers and householders are only visited by one public sector team, not two. A next step is to consider how this process can contribute to mapping updates, in parallel with rolling the arrangement out to other local authorities.

In this way, LPS is successfully working with councils to provide an up-to-date valuation list as a basis for timely collection of rates. We are now reviewing how this joint working can be extended into areas such as sharing information on vacant properties, given that properties declared vacant for rating purposes are considerably more than the list of properties which don't generate any rubbish in their bins! In an era of concerns over data security, all of this work has required very close liaison with the Information Commissioner's Office, which has been extremely supportive.

An even broader data sharing exercise went live in June 2008 – a Northern Ireland GeoHub that serves as a repository for all spatial data. Bear in mind that 'everything happens somewhere', and at least 80% of public sector data is place-related and contains tools for data

'The vision is that all public servants will be able to access spatial data to support their work as easily as they can access word processing tools'

– Iain Greenway



combination and manipulation. The response so far has been extremely positive, with more than 100 datasets provided for loading to the GeoHub. These include base mapping, soil contamination, planning, flooding and statistical data. The power available from combining them is limited only by the imagination – and the bandwidth of the communication lines!

Not only will the system be invaluable across the public service, the vision is that all public servants will be able to access spatial data to support their work as easily as they can access word processing tools. It also meets

Northern Ireland's requirements under a recent European Directive on environmental data.

These are early steps for LPS, which is still in the process of creating a sense of joined-upness among staff, supported by clear joined-upness from the top of the organisation. Each step reveals further potential, with the challenge being sourcing funding to create the infrastructure that will deliver further service improvement and even greater efficiency.

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# - and Goodbye to a proud heritage

After mapping Ireland from the 1830s, Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland (OSNI) ceased to exist as an independent organisation in March, when it became part of Land & Property Services (LPS). OSNI staff have traditionally identified strongly with the organisation, many of them working for OSNI for their entire careers – as had many fathers or uncles before them – so many felt a strong and proud heritage was being ‘thrown away’. It was an emotional and intellectual challenge to prepare staff for the future while still running an organisation to meet its annual targets.

A corporate target to improve staff perception of the management of change by 10% was set at the beginning of the financial year. Given the amount of change in the year, this was bold – some might say heroic! Progress was measured by a quarterly on-line survey of 15 questions. Results varied over the months but an overall improvement of 8% was recorded. The freeform comments were very telling – in November, the raw emotion of the ‘loss’ or ‘death’ of OSNI came through very strongly.

Senior managers had individually to face up to and accept the change in their personal circumstances. The Chief Executive became a Director; OSNI Directors did not become LPS Management Board members. Formally

## It was decided at an early stage to hold a Celebration Event to mark the change

appointing all OSNI staff to positions in LPS was, however, delayed until mid-March and some momentum was lost. A key lesson? Tell people their job, their boss and their desk location as early as possible – just about everything else is secondary.

It was decided at an early stage to hold a Celebration Event to mark the change. Organised by a volunteer group of staff, it included past as well as present staff, with previous staff of more than 10 years service invited. More than 100 former members came along to what was a tremendous day. They enjoyed the historic and current mapping and equipment displays, joined in a variety of activities – and simply caught up with former colleagues. A past staff association was one result of the day.

Speakers included all previous living Chief

Executives, as well as representatives of the parent Department. In the evening, current staff enjoyed dinner together and partied until the early hours. It was perhaps a key turning point for staff feeling – the wake had been held and life could move forward.

With the new organisation up and running, focus amongst OSNI Management Board turned to the administrative tasks of closing the old organisation. Annual report and accounts are being finalised – and include an insert booklet of OSNI’s history. The emphasis has been on ensuring a smooth transfer of governance as signs on buildings and logos on headed paper were changed.

And so OSNI moved formally to its end, with all governance matters handed over, Board committees formally recommending their closure, and the Management Board consigning itself to history. Two vestiges remain – the planned one of the OSNI brand, standing for quality in mapping; and the unplanned one of the OSNI email addresses – the technicians require several months to change these to the new domain. As ever, technology had the last word!

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# Easy to see rent benefits

Tenants renting accommodation from private landlords can now – for the first time – calculate the possible amount of housing benefit available to them from their local authority, thanks to a huge IT project at The Rent Service (TRS), an executive agency of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

Local Housing Allowance (LHA), introduced in April, required TRS to make information available to local authorities and the public. The result is the new LHA-Direct website, developed in conjunction with local authorities in England, Rent Officers Wales and the Rent Registration Service in Scotland.

TRS chief executive Patrick Boyle said: 'The launch of the LHA-Direct website has been a huge project. It holds millions of pieces of data that will enable us to keep improving the quality of our service and making LHA information much more accessible to our customer.'

'The project also demonstrates our commitment to work in partnership with our parent department DWP and our local authority customers to implement housing benefit reform with greater efficiency and transparency.'

LHA is the new way of calculating housing benefit for tenants renting accommodation

from private landlords. It applies to private sector tenants who make a new claim, and for existing claimants who change address or move from public into private sector accommodation.

LHA-Direct enables tenants renting accommodation from a private landlord to view LHA rates and calculate the possible amount of housing benefit available to them from their local authority.

LHA is a personal allowance based on the Broad Rental Market Area (BRMA) that a property is in and the number of bedrooms it has. Different LHA rates apply in different BRMAs, based on the median rent charged by private sector landlords. The role of TRS is to define the BRMAs, collect lettings information and determine the median rents.

The website has three main functions: a bedroom calculator to determine how many bedrooms a tenant may be eligible for (depending on the size of their household), a local authority search to find LHA rates by local authority, and a postcode search to find LHA rates by location.

Boyle said: 'The background information to every one of the 153 BRMAs in England is now available on LHA-Direct, giving greater

transparency to the way BRMAs are determined. The magnitude of the task was quite astounding. The geographical mapping was an intricate piece of work on an individual basis, let alone for a national set of more than 150 indicators.'

LHA-Direct project leader Gary Trent said: 'LHA-Direct has been a big success, involving huge cooperation from local authorities. It is a tribute to all those involved that LHA-Direct went live to plan and within budget. We will continue to enhance the website to ensure we continue to improve services to our customers and the public.'

● More information at:

<https://lha-direct.therentservice.gov.uk>



Patrick Boyle

ACE Reporter

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# Banking on old and new

Bringing together new and old. That is the challenge in promoting the newly launched Government Banking Service (GBS) designed to bring together banking services across Government. GBS will take over as the banking service provider for more than 900 public sector customers of the Office of the Paymaster General (OPG).

The GBS is both a new and an old organisation. Its old roots are in the OPG that has been operating since 1836 as a banking shared service provider for government and the wider public sector. It is new in its vision to become a customer-focused, cost-efficient banking service across Government.

HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) Director of Banking Services Gabs Makhoulf said: 'We have a unique opportunity to build on the successes of the past and innovate to a better future. Our vision is to be the provider of choice for banking services to the public sector.'

'OPG provides banking transactions and back office services through a service integrator, the Bank of England and others. It holds public sector balances and supports HM Treasury's cash management activities, helping to minimise the overall cost of government borrowing.

'Ministers have decided that Government should play a more active role in the payments industry and that the future clearing banking needs of the Chancellor's departments (including HMRC, OPG and National Savings & Investments) should be delivered through a single shared provider.

'This provider is GBS which will also take on the role of representing government banking in the wider payments industry. Responsibility for the OPG and for creating the GBS transferred to HMRC from HM Treasury in 2006.

'The GBS is therefore a new brand embarking on a new challenge. We have set ourselves an ambitious vision: to build on our heritage and become the banking provider of choice in the public sector. It is an exciting time as we start that journey.'

The project dates back to 2004 when the Chancellor's Departments Review of Banking recommended steps to bring together a significant part of the Treasury, HMRC and National Savings & Investments banking operations.

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury, Angela Eagle MP, announced

in March 2008 that Citibank and Royal Bank of Scotland had won contracts to provide clearing bank services currently provided by the Bank of England. The contracts are for five years with the option to extend on an annual basis for a further two years. In July 2004 the Bank of England announced that it would withdraw from the provision of retail banking and clearing services to its commercial customers.

The GBS will process around 10 million payable orders; 100,000 CHAPS (electronic bank-to-bank same-day payments) payments and receipts; and over 40 million BACS (automated) payments every year.



Gabs Makhoulf

# Feedback

Read something that interests you? Concerns you? Annoys you? Want a chance to put across your view? Want to find out more? Whatever your view, please share it with us.

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# More about ACE

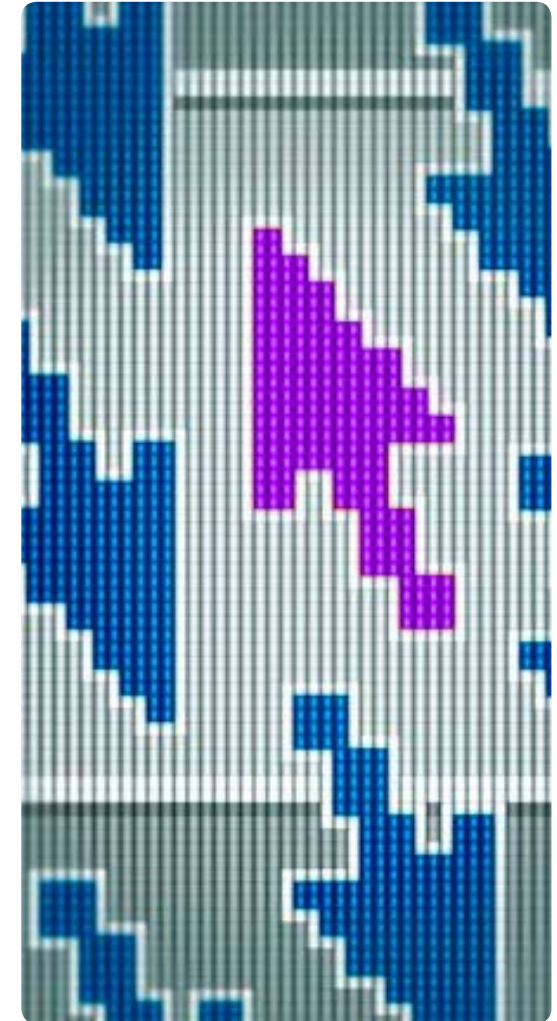
ACE is the UK ACE Association and is an inclusive organisation open to Chief Executives and senior managers who report to Chief Executives, working in central government Executive Agencies, Non-Departmental Public Bodies, Non-Ministerial Departments and Trading Funds. Other Chief Executives of public sector organisations are able to apply for membership, but approval of membership will be subject to the agreement of the Board. ACE promotes effective government and provides networking and learning opportunities for its members. ACE was formed in 2004 and exists to promote excellent working relationships throughout all aspects of government. It will seek, on an annual basis, to:

- Generate the opportunity for networking on the basis of an up-to-date database of contact details and specialisms.
- Produce regular newsletters for the purpose of promoting and sharing good practice, experience and knowledge.

- Organise an annual conference
- Organise two events which:
  - Highlight priority areas of action for government
  - Offer specific opportunities for networking across the public and private sector
  - Provide a point of contact between the Civil Service Steering Board (CSSB) and the Association and its members.

In undertaking the above, ACE will neither seek to involve itself in policy development nor representative lobbying. Neither will ACE have the power to make decisions that would bind one, any or all, of the members. ACE is funded from member subscriptions. The ACE London headquarters is located in the heart of Westminster and provides a range of facilities for members. This quiet and private location is ideal for relaxing, reading the current journals, meeting a colleague or simply having a cuppa. You can use the dedicated computer terminal to access the internet and read your emails

- For a location map click [here](#).



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