

## **Information Management: A Vision for West Berkshire Council**

### **Executive Summary**

Today's successful organisations recognise information as a key resource – alongside employees, budgets and physical assets. With the rapid growth of electronic information networks and their use by businesses worldwide, successful information management adds value to an organisation and can mark the difference between organisational life or death.

All organisations hold and produce information, and most would claim that they practice information management, although they might define it differently. Many organisations confuse information management with records management and with filing. If something is filed and accessible, they claim the information is being managed.

The reality is very different. In an age when a number of government statutes and initiatives, including data protection, freedom of information, joined-up government, citizen focused services, best value, and comprehensive performance assessment, are buzzwords, any organisation - and particularly local government - needs to develop information management as a core competency. A failure to manage information resources within an organisation will invariably lead to duplication of effort, wasted resources, and failure to comply with legislation.... The stuff of nightmares.

### **A definition of information management:**

“The application of management principles to the acquisition, organization, control, dissemination and use of information relevant to the effective operation of organizations of all kinds. 'Information' here refers to all types of information of value, whether having their origin inside or outside the organization, including data resources, such as production data; records and files related, for example, to the personnel function; market research data; and competitive intelligence from a wide range of sources. Information management deals with the value, quality, ownership, use and security of information in the context of organizational performance.” (Wilson, T.D (1997) "Information management" in *International Encyclopedia of Information and Library Science*, pp. 187-196. London: Routledge))

### **Information management – responsibilities**

Information management requires a strong structure of staff with responsibility across services and processes. At present the Council has rather a mixed bag of resources – with representatives for various aspects of information and statutory requirements (the

intranet and internet, Freedom of Information and Data Protection, BVPI157). However, these reps are often ad hoc and trying to fulfil these roles above and beyond their already full time jobs.

To deal with information management in a holistic way in the long term, WBC should aim to set up a strategic group which carries responsibility for information management. This group should also provide a framework of governance and guidance for all staff as information management becomes a core competence across the Council. This is not achievable overnight – in fact it might take years to reach this level of competence, but this plan takes us on the first steps of our journey towards this goal.

As well as this 'strategic steering group' there is a need for a 'doer' group at Service Unit level, to co-ordinate the information created. The technical and operational aspects of this structure are addressed in Jan Jones paper 'A Proposed Framework for Information Management within West Berkshire/Amey West Berkshire' (attached).

### **Information Management Infrastructure**

A number of structures and processes support information management.

Information Strategy is the process which identifies the resources already owned by the organisation, and plans the ways in which the resources can be managed.

- This is usually achieved by carrying out an information audit, which can be linked to other processes, such as creation or updating of the publication scheme list for the authority (e.g. for FoI compliance), and the auditing of personal information for Data Protection purposes.
- The audit should make clear who owns the information and who is responsible for it – simple records management protocols.
- A records management policy which defines the ways in which information resources are treated should form part of the corporate approach to records (see below).
- The information management team can then assess the cost and value of information resources, plan ways in which information can be improved and developed, and look at ways to exploit the information resources already in place.
- Records management is a prerequisite for proper compliance with both the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Data Protection Act 1998.
- Records retention is a subsidiary of records management. In the light of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 all public authorities must show that they comply with the various legislative statutes on record retention. As anyone will be able to ask to see recorded information, the local authority must be able to show whether a record exists and where it is stored, or alternatively why it has been destroyed.

### **From Information to Knowledge:**

Knowledge management is a way to approach the management and use of the organisation's knowledge assets. Knowledge assets are knowledge regarding the organisation and encompassing products, processes, technologies, markets and the organisation itself. These are not the same as records – for example the internet and intranet are both assets in the sense of being information tools. Knowledge management would encompass strategies to use both the intranet (as a corporate information tool) and the internet (as a customer or client interface). Knowledge management also encompasses the management of staff skills and would therefore require skills audits, training audits and the use of systems such as performance management and assessment to promote and increase staff knowledge.

Communications strategies are a subsidiary of knowledge management and define the way in which the organisation will inform its staff and the external world about its products and services. In the case of communication with employees, this also encompasses staff awareness of corporate plans and their role in delivery. Communication is generally one of the major areas where organisations fail – either because information isn't properly communicated or because it doesn't go to the right people.

Performance management is a subsidiary of the communications strategy. It is a communication process which manages and improves the contribution of staff within an organisation through job descriptions, performance standards, appraisals and feedback, and employee development. It depends upon, and contributes to, best practice within the organisation.

Policies and protocols set out the ways in which the organisation will manage aspects of its information. As an example, an ICT Policy or Health and Safety Policy defines the organisation's corporate responsibilities and stated aims under statutory or best practice requirements. A protocol, such as an Information Sharing Protocol under Data Protection, will define a framework or agreement for certain processes to be carried out in a similar manner on each occasion.

The attached diagram seeks to explain the 'sausage machine' of information management - what goes in, how it is processed and what is output at the other end. All of these inputs and outputs are not specific to West Berkshire Council and should be viewed as generic aspects of the information / communications mix.

## Information Management Processes



