

Progress Implementing the Information Society



Second Report of the Inter-Departmental Implementation Group

July 1999.

Introduction

1. The First Report of the Inter-Departmental Implementation Group on the Information Society was considered by Government on 21 December, 1998. Following this, "Implementing the Information Society in Ireland: an Action Plan" was launched by the Taoiseach in January 1999, in booklet format and on the world wide web. Since then almost 2,000 copies of the booklet have been distributed, within and beyond the public sector.
2. The Action Plan has been well received generally, and is a credible blueprint for the task of implementing the Information Society in Ireland. It identifies the main tasks involved in facilitating electronic commerce, opening up access to the new technologies for the less privileged, and modernising delivery of public services through those new technologies. It also sets out an ambitious timeframe for those tasks and measures.
3. **At the time of adoption of the Action Plan, the Government directed the Inter-Departmental Implementation Group to assess the resources needed to implement the plan. This has been the primary focus of the Group over recent months.**
4. This report provides a review of progress since the Action Plan was launched. It also includes details of further initiatives arising from the Action Plan which are now being proposed.

Conclusions/Recommendations

5. The review of progress to date plus the assessment of resource requirements confirm that **substantial additional staff and funding resources need to be made available immediately if rapid progress is to be made and the objectives of the Action Plan met. Furthermore, there is a need for an assured ongoing source of funding and/or staff resources as new initiatives are identified.** In addition to staff and funding resources, it is recognised that special measures will be needed to attract and retain personnel with the necessary IT skills.

6. In certain cases EU Community Support Framework funding may be available for initiatives, often on a matching funding basis. Where this is the case, the existence of a source of funding at national level should assist in attracting EU funds.

7. The resources needed to implement the Plan are very substantial but not indefinite. In most cases an intense period of up to three years is envisaged.

8. Finally, it is necessary to accept that the Action Plan itself will require modification and elaboration in the light of experience and as new opportunities emerge and technologies change. **It is especially important that the potential offered by the new ICTs be appreciated by senior management across the public service.** To that end the Department of the Taoiseach and CMOD are continuing to engage in bilateral meetings with key Departments to explore the scope for further initiatives/ action points which are in keeping with the overall objectives and vision of the Plan.

Progress Report

Progress continues to be made on the implementation of the Action Plan. There has, however, been slippage against target dates, primarily due to lack of adequate resources. This difficulty is particularly acute in the areas of integration of new technologies into public administration and delivery of public services, where progress is dependant upon additional resources being made available.

The position in relation to the Action Plan commitments is set out below. Numbers refer to the paragraph references in the Action Plan. New initiatives which have been identified are dealt with separately at the end.

Telecommunications infrastructure:

8. International connectivity.

The Government has entered into an agreement for the construction by the middle of 2000, of two telecommunications cables affording access to 24 European cities and across the Atlantic to the U.S. network via New York. The IDA/Enterprise Ireland are in discussion with key telecoms operators about the formation of a users consortium.

9. Submarine cable licensing.

Discussions between the Departments of Public Enterprise and Marine and Natural Resources are ongoing and licence requirements will be dealt with as the need arises.

10. Regulatory issues.

The Minister for Public Enterprise is preparing legislation to further develop the telecommunications regulatory framework. In consultation with the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, the legislation will include provisions for the effective management of the respective functions of the Office of the Director of Telecommunications Regulation and the Competition Authority. The Broadcasting Bill, 1999, includes provisions relating to the regulation of digital television transmission, including the respective roles of the ODTR and the Independent Radio and Television Commission (to be replaced by the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland) in this area. In March, 1999, the Director, with the

consent of the Minister for Public Enterprise, made regulations providing for the establishment of a new licencing system for cable TV and MMDS operators, which requires licencees to develop a rollout plan for digital programme services.

11. Nation-wide broadband network.

€23 million of EU funding has been awarded to projects rolling out broadband infrastructure to the regions and education institutions, leveraging a total investment of 55 million euros. Outline proposals have been submitted to the Department of Finance for EU funding under the next Community Support Framework for further projects.

12. North-South Digital Corridor.

Discussions - under the aegis of the Department of Foreign Affairs - are ongoing with the Northern authorities. Three sub-groups were established recently, i.e. Information Transfer; Infrastructure; Enterprise Support.

13. Local Access.

The ODTR published a consultation paper on unbundling the local loop in March 1999, and the report is expected in July 1999. The ODTR is running a competition for 8 wireless local loop licences with the results expected in July 1999.

14. Telecom Eireann IPO and divestiture of Cablelink

The Telecom Eireann IPO has been completed. Cablelink has been sold to NTL.

15. Communications Infrastructure Group.

Progress in this area will be linked to the provision of additional resources.

Development of Electronic Business Opportunities

16. Digital Park.

The CityWest Digital Park was formally launched by the Taoiseach on 5 July. The "carrier hotel" (the point at which the international connectivity branches out to individual networks) for the international connectivity project is located on this site. East Point 2 has been selected as the Docklands Digital Park site.

17 & 18 Business Development Action Programme & Entrepreneurship.

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and its agencies are preparing a major policy programme on e-commerce, incorporating the elements set out under this action point. This is expected to be launched in July. Enterprise Ireland have launched an e-commerce initiative to accelerate effective e-commerce activity among Irish SME's - in particular among Enterprise Ireland's client base, (two thirds of whom do not yet have websites, and one third of whom do not yet use e-mail). The project aims at building awareness, increasing adoption and fuelling more effective use of ICTs.

The Department of Public Enterprise, after interdepartmental and agency consultation, recently launched a 2.5 m Euro fund aimed at providing a national e-commerce infrastructure, facilitating regional development through e-commerce and exploiting the economic potential of e-commerce, particularly at the level of the SME sector.

The Information Society Commission has established an advisory Group on the content industry. The Group intends to make recommendations by the end of this year on how best to develop the industry so that Ireland is well placed to capitalise on the increased demand for

content anticipated with the advent of Digital T.V. and more widespread use of the internet. The group will look at the skills which will be needed in the area and will also examine what might be needed to encourage owners/creators of content to locate here. The possibility of setting up a "multimedia village", combining an R&D facility with small business incubators and support services, is being investigated.

Enabling Measures

19. Access (libraries).

This initiative will facilitate public libraries upgrading the level of ICT infrastructure and services offered to the public, including services aimed at reducing social exclusion, arising from physical, social and economic barriers. It is proposed to allocate £1m in 1999 as the first phase of ongoing funding support for this project - estimated to cost £6 million.

20. Access (community and voluntary sector).

This will require allocation of additional funds.

21. Access (alternatives).

The Information Society Commission has established an Advisory Group to examine "IT access for all". The group is working to identify the key elements for a national strategy to promote IT Access for All. A proposal for "e-mail for all" is also being considered by this group - see 23 below.

22. Internet Access Costs.

The ODTR has issued a consultation paper on Internet access charges, and intends to issue a report in July 1999.

23. "E-Mail for all".

This is being examined by the Information Society Commission's new Access Advisory Group - see 21 above.

24. Certification authorities and digital signatures.

An Post has recently launched a certification service. The Department of Public Enterprise has prepared a draft consultation paper on the subject of legislation in this area and has commenced consultation with interested parties via a focus group. The consultation paper containing outline legislative proposals will be published in July. A draft EU Directive on electronic signatures and certification services was adopted by the Council of Telecommunications Ministers on 22 April, 1999.

In addition, as part of the planning process for Revenue On-Line Service, the 1999 Finance Act included provision in the legislation to allow for the electronic filing of Tax returns, and the facility for Revenue, if necessary, to become a Certification Authority for the purpose of issuing digital signatures to its customers

25. Protection of rights and data.

Ongoing.

26. Public Service access interfaces (PPSN/PSC - Personal Public Service Number/Public Service Card)

The Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs has prepared and circulated a Memorandum for the Government setting out proposals - the REACH Initiative - to build upon the Public Services Card and Personal Public Service Number in order to create a national infrastructure for data sharing and access to public services. A Memorandum will be presented to Government in July seeking approval for the initiative and for the resources required for its implementation.

27. Public Service access interfaces (GRO)

The report on the modernisation of the Civil Registration Service has been finalised and its recommendations accepted by management in the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs and the Department of Health and Children. A joint Memorandum is being submitted to Government seeking approval to proceed with the modernisation programme at a cost of £7.3 million approximately.

28. Public Service access interfaces (CRO)

No further progress reported.

29. Public Service access interfaces (co-ordination).

The importance of common standards/protocols has been underlined in a number of meetings held between the Department of the Taoiseach, CMOD and other key Departments/agencies. This is also addressed in the Dept. of Social, Community and Family Affairs Memo referred to at 26 above.

30. Electronic payment systems.

AIB and Bank of Ireland retained the Boston Consulting Group to assist them in the preparation of proposals for systems to support payment of utility bills and Government payments (grants, welfare payments etc.). Consultative panels were established to assist in this process and a number of Departments/agencies participated in these panels. A proposal has been received from the Irish Payment Services Organisation, which is being considered by the relevant Departments.

Legislative and regulatory measures

31. Digital Signatures and encryption.

The consultation paper referred to at 24 above includes a first draft of Heads of Bill.

An EU Directive governing this matter was adopted on 22 April. The 1999 Finance Act added a new Chapter (Chapter 6 to Part 38 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997) which provides for the electronic filing of tax returns; it also provides that Revenue may become a Certification Authority in the absence of a suitable alternative. One of the principal objectives of the REACH Initiative is to develop a public infrastructure to enable electronic transactions between the citizen and the public service (e-commerce/e-government). Proposals will be brought forward to establish a Certification Authority for citizens dealing in a personal capacity with the public service.

32. *Electronic evidence in Courts.*

Section 209 of the Finance Act, 1999 deals with electronic filing of tax returns. It includes a provision that in civil and criminal proceedings under the Taxes Acts, any rule of law restricting admissibility or use of hearsay evidence shall not apply to a hard copy of a validly filed electronic tax return.

Additional staffing and possibly also legal consultancy resources will be necessary to enable progress to be made by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform on Electronic Evidence/Hearsay legislation.

33. *Data protection.*

Enabling legislation is due to be published later this year. It will be influenced by the resolution of differences between EU and US interpretations of privacy. The preparation of Regulations by the Department of Public Enterprise to implement an EU Directive on data protection in the telecommunications sector is at an advanced stage, with draft regulations circulated to interested parties for comment in June, 1999.

34. *Copyright.*

The Copyright and Related Rights Bill, 1999 has been published (No. 18 of 1999).

35. *Telecom Eireann IPO.*

The relevant legislation was enacted on 7 April, 1999. (See also # 14 above.)

36. *Telecommunications infrastructure installation/access.*

The Telecommunications (Infrastructure) Bill, 1999 was published in March, 1999 and presented to Seanad Eireann.

37. *Telecommunications regulation.*

Legislation is in preparation - see paragraph 10 above.

38. *Digital TV.*

Legislation - (the Broadcasting Bill, 1999) (i) to provide for the transfer of the existing analogue transmission function of RTE to a new entity in which RTE will retain a minority stake and which will provide and operate the digital terrestrial broadcasting infrastructure and (ii) to expand the role of the Independent Television and Radio Commission (to be re-named the Irish Broadcasting Commission) to cover standards for the content of non free-to-air indigenous broadcasting services on all digital platforms, was approved by the Government on 11 May and published on 27 May. The second stage debate is expected to begin early in the Autumn Dáil session. In March, 1999, the Director, with the consent of the Minister for Public Enterprise, made regulations providing for the establishment of a new licensing system for cable TV MMDS operators, which requires licencees to develop a rollout plan for digital programme services. The Director has issued licences under the new scheme to most of the operators involved.

"Digico"

Consultants have been selected to manage, (under the direction of a project management group comprising the Departments of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands, Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Finance, Public Enterprise and RTE,) the separation of the RTE transmission network and the establishment of the new joint venture company. It is expected that the project will be successfully concluded by the end of this year.

39. *International developments.*

Work is ongoing.

Taxation Developments

A detailed report on the tax implications of e-commerce, was published by Revenue on 16 June. As well as analysing the technical tax issues surrounding the growth of e-commerce, the report aims to encourage Irish business and tax practitioners to provide Revenue with their views on this matter. To this end the Report has been given the widest possible circulation. It can also be downloaded from the revenue website (www.revenue.ie).

ICTs and delivery of public services

40. *Strand one - information services (websites).*

The Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs has initiated a project to develop its website in the context of the REACH Initiative and the NSSB Citizens Life Events Database project. The Department of Health and Children are conscious of the need to ensure that its website is continuously maintained up to date - though resource constraints can and do sometimes constrain the realisation of this objective. This position would apply in the case of several Departments.

41. *Strand one - information services (e-mail).*

Progress will depend on allocation of resources.

42. & 43. *Strand one - information services (content standards/guidelines,) & Website quality standards, including needs of the disabled*

An Inter-Departmental Group - the Web Publications Group - chaired by Department of the Taoiseach - and drawing upon relevant expertise in a number of Government/Public Service Departments, Offices and Agencies has been established. It is focusing on formulation of recommendations on common service-wide guidelines on content, format and presentation of public service websites. In focusing on these issues it has established a number of ad-hoc sub-groups to focus on specific issues, such as publication policy, access (including for people with disabilities), bi-lingualism, and technical issues. The Group will report (to the Implementation Group) in the Autumn.

44. *Strand one - information services (databases).*

A joint project has been initiated by the Department of Social Community and Family Affairs and the National Social Services Board to develop a citizen-centred Life Events database which will be accessible to all citizens on the web. It will build on the NSSB Citizens Information Database which will itself shortly be made available on the web.

The Department of Foreign Affairs is progressing with the development of websites to provide a service to citizens and businesses abroad (see below under "new initiatives" for proposed enhancement of such facilities for the future).

45. Strand one - information services (training of public servants).

The public service will increasingly be encouraged to apply the benefits of Information and Communications Technologies. This will entail keeping abreast of new developments and considering how and where these may be applied in delivering public services. CMOD - the part of the Department of Finance with responsibility for management training - already incorporates ICT elements in a number of their training programmes; these include, an introduction to the Internet, the benefits of ICTs, relevant developments in electronic Government and their potential for the civil service. CMOD will build upon existing modules and where appropriate, will develop new initiatives with a view to highlighting the practical benefits of widespread adoption of ICTs in the delivery of services more efficiently.

Revenue and the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs will include ECDL (European Computer Driving License) under the refund of fees scheme.

46. Strand two - interactive services (principles)

The Department of the Taoiseach and CMOD have been in regular liaison with key Departments/agencies to underline the necessity of common standards/protocols. This is also being addressed by the Web Publications Group (see No. 42 above). Common standards and protocols is also focused upon in the Memo prepared by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs - referred to at No. 26 above.

47. Strand Two - Interactive Services.

The Land Registry "Integrated Title Registration Information System" (ITRIS) project is to go live in July (see "new initiatives" below).

48. Strand two - interactive services (intranets/public procurement/VPN).

Limited progress reported pending allocation of resources (see also new projects - below).

49. Strand two - interactive services (electronic payment systems)

Progress dependant on outcome of discussions with banks - see 30 above.

50. Strand two - interactive services (development plans for flagship projects)

Meetings have been held between Department of the Taoiseach and Finance (CMOD) with a number of Departments to stress the importance of such initiatives. The Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs has initiated a project to develop and deploy an enterprise-wide infrastructure to enable "e-government" for all its services. The infrastructure will comprise access and security policies and systems. A pilot application to allow other Departments to search its central client database will be deployed on the web towards the end of 1999 (see also "new initiatives" - below).

51. Strand two - interactive services (Revenue)

Revenue is developing a "Revenue On-Line Service" (ROS) to allow clients conduct their business with Revenue electronically. As an initial step, Revenue issued a Request for Information in March 1999 to which it received 31 replies. A Revenue team has since been appointed to prepare a Request for Tender which will issue in July, and the intention is to appoint the successful tenderer before the end of the year. VAT and employers PAYE returns will be the first to be released through ROS mid 2000. The phased release of further elements of ROS is planned for the succeeding two years.

52. Strand two - interactive services (Companies Registration Office)

Two projects involving the introduction of electronic filing of annual returns by insurance companies and the facility to calculate and submit claims for Redundancy and Insolvency payments are envisaged. The CRO has already made financial provision for much of the work involved in implementing its electronic commerce project. Additional resources will be necessary to develop appropriate security protocols.

53 Strand Two - interactive services (Social, Community and Family Affairs).

A draft Memo for Government covering the PSC/PPSN concepts has been prepared (see 26 above). Progress is dependant on securing the necessary resources.

The Ennis Information Age Town e-Pay trial, conducted jointly with the banks, has reached its planned conclusion. It was very successful in terms of customer acceptance and in validating the business model.

54. Strand two - interactive services (Health and Children)

Preliminary consideration is being carried out but progress is severely limited due to lack of resources.

55. Strand two - interactive services (Agriculture and Food)

The Department will be commencing a feasibility study in August 1999 looking at the extent to which its services can be made available electronically. In addition it will examine the feasibility of provision of e-mail extension to all of its staff and the use of the Internet/Intranet within the Department itself. Substantive progress is dependant on securing the necessary resources.

56. Strand two - interactive services (Environment and Local Government).

Development of an internet-based system for making a driving test application will commence in early 2000. This will also facilitate current measures to reduce the backlog of driver test applications. Investigations are also progressing to determine the feasibility of paying motor tax electronically.

57. Strand two - interactive services (Central Statistics Office)

Progress will be dependant on securing the necessary additional resources (in part from within the Department).

58. Strand two - interactive services (sectoral intranets)

The Department of Environment and Local Government will develop its Intranet to align closely with the proposed Intranet between local authorities - being planned by the Local Government Computer Services Board - and the Civil Service Intranet.

The Department of Education and Science is planning to develop a secure intranet for the education sector. Progress will be dependant on securing the necessary resources.

59. Strand two - interactive services (DTT/public service delivery channel)

No progress reported.

60. Strand two - interactive services (Annual reports)

Departments will include in their annual reports a section on progress being made in the use of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) and in the delivery of services electronically, including the results of an internal audit in this area.

61. Strand three - fully integrated services.

Formulation of Strand Two projects will take account of the potential to build on such projects and initiatives to deliver fully integrated electronic services in due course.

Support areas where action is needed

62. Awareness. (ISC/IBEC campaign)

The awareness campaign by the Information Society Commission and IBEC got under way in March. A full-time project Executive has been appointed to manage the campaign, together with a Steering Committee consisting of representatives of the two organisations. A number of seminars have already taken place, with others - amounting to a total of 10 in all - scheduled between now and March 2000. The success of the campaign is being measured and feedback to date has shown that the vast majority of delegates intend to take action as a result of the campaign i.e. set up a website, improve their existing websites etc..

63. Awareness (general public etc.)

The Information Society Commission is progressing with plans for a follow-up series for Tech TV. It is also participating in a number of general awareness events/initiatives. In particular, the ISC is planning a major awareness event in conjunction with the National Centre for Technology in Education, building on the "Netd@ys" project, to run from 13 to 21 November, 1999. The week long nation-wide campaign will specifically target the "late adopters" of technology identified in the ISC research with emphasis on Access for All, but will encompass all strata of Irish Society.

64. Education (Investment Fund, Schools IT 2000)

Work is progressing rapidly under the Department of Education and Science, including the application of the Scientific & Technological Education (Investment) Fund and the Schools IT 2000 Project.

A combination of grant aid and a partnership arrangement with Telecom Eireann has ensured that approximately 15,000 new PCs have been placed in schools since mid 1998. Extra provision was made for pupils with special needs. More than 50% of serving primary and second-level teachers have attended IT training during the past 12 months. Funding of more than £3 million was allocated in March 1999 to 48 innovative projects, involving 228 schools and 58 public and private sector partners. These projects will develop best practice models for dissemination throughout the system. A number of public-private partnership projects are underway under Schools IT 2000, including the Wired for Learning Project which involves an investment of \$1 million by IBM.

65. Education (lifelong learning).

The Information Society Commission published a report entitled "Building a Capacity for Change - Lifelong Learning in the Information Society " on 7 July.

66. Future skills needs.

On 22 April, the Government announced a detailed response to the report of the Expert Group on Future Skills. Under a £75 million investment plan, 5,400 extra high-tech places will be provided in the third level sector, in a direct response to the Expert Group on Future Skills. On 31 March the Taoiseach launched the FIT (Fast track to Information Technology) Action Plan, an IT industry-driven initiative which aims to provide training and full-time employment to 3,500 long-term unemployed people over the next three years.

67. Application of ICTs to the elderly/people with disabilities.

It is important to address the issue of access for the elderly and for people with disabilities. In addressing this important aspect, due regard will be had to best practice in web page design so as to ensure maximum social inclusivity. The National Disability Authority will be invited to monitor standards in this area. Access, for people with disabilities will also be a key focus of the Web Publications Group in formulating their recommendations - (see No. 42 above).

68. Market information and benchmarking progress.

The Department of Public Enterprise is currently preparing a specification for a Market Observatory Project. This project aims to establish a permanent Market Observatory among the Departments of Public Enterprise, Enterprise, Trade and Employment and its agencies, Forfás and the Information Society Commission. It is intended that a consultant will be used for a period of 3 months in order to establish the initial phase of this project.

The Information Society Commission has established a new Advisory Group to focus on benchmarking Ireland's progress as an Information Society across a broad range of indicators, and to research international developments.

69. Research and development.

The Technology Foresight initiative has produced a comprehensive report which seeks to influence preparation of the National Development Plan, and includes recommendations covering a substantial investment programme, expanded R&D, and establishment of a Centre for Advanced Informatics.

The Minister for Education and Science has launched a major joint public/private research initiative which involves investment of £220 million in the period 1999-2001 in research programmes in third level education institutions. The results of the first cycle in a competitive process, involving tendering of proposals by institutions and assessment by an international panel of experts are to be announced in late July 1999. This will result in an allocation of over £100 million in respect of successful proposals.

The Minister for Education and Science also introduced this year a range of measures to support and develop the teaching of physics and chemistry at second level which will cost £15 million over three years. These measures provide for the modernisation of school science laboratories, the revision of different science syllabi, extensive training for teachers and an annual payment per student for schools to provide materials for the teaching of physics and chemistry at Leaving Certificate level.

Taking the work forward

70. International debate.

Ireland is increasingly represented at key EU/OECD discussions, and delegations are increasingly taking active/lead roles in those discussions.

71. Implementation Group.

The group whose work led to publication of the Action Plan and this Progress Report, will now, with additional membership as appropriate, oversee the development and implementation of that plan.

72. Policy Development Team.

A special unit, headed by a Principal Officer has been established in the Department of the Taoiseach to assist the Implementation Group in its work, particularly in monitoring, co-ordinating, guiding policy development and adding impetus in this area.

73. Resources (assessment)

Resource implications have been assessed by the Implementation Group and funding is being sought from Government for the implementation of aspects of the Action Plan which require additional resource allocations.

74. Resources (internal priority)

The Action Plan has been brought to the attention of all Secretary Generals/Heads of Office. A number of Departments have made additional resources available internally to deal with aspects of the Action Plan.

New Initiatives and Action Points

In addition to the action points set out in the Action Plan (published in January 1999), a number of new initiatives have since been identified. These are described below.

Local Authorities

The Department of Environment and Local Government has provided information on the current state of play in the local authorities and on services in their remit which are suitable for electronic delivery. Work is under way in a number of areas with a view to increasing use of new technologies in the local authorities. However, to facilitate development of fully integrated public services it would be appropriate for this work to be aligned with the timeframe and procedures envisaged under the Action Plan.

Areas identified include:

Development of a sectoral Intranet (as provided for in point 58 of the Action Plan). The strategy for the proposed Intranet/Extranet project will be to build on the homogenous nature of local government IT systems and the delivery of similar core services to the public. The project will utilise the 'best of breed' from existing Web-based developments in local authorities. The system will be deployed throughout the local government system, with Intranets operating in each organisation, and common information feeding through an Extranet. Over time, remaining legacy systems will be plugged out of the Intranet, being replaced with more flexible, inherently Web-enabled applications.

This development will also facilitate the introduction of a common Local Government Web-site, offering single-point access to the sector. A range of other candidate services for electronic delivery has also been identified, including:

- an on-line directory of local authority services (which can be incorporated into the databases to be developed for citizen and business life-event information - para. 44),
- motor-tax payment (see information on para. 56 above),
- job opportunities service,
- information on public works such as roadworks, water and sewerage disruption,
- student grants,
- commercial rates payments,
- extended use of e-mail within the local authority system.

Development of an Internet-based Procurement System (e-procurement). In terms of delivering better services and stimulating e-commerce, the fact that local authorities collectively spend approximately £2 Billion annually is highly relevant. Coupled with the scale of this spend is a requirement for open and fair competition for public contracts. The e-procurement site would link with the local government web-site and collectively would also enable job and public notices advertising, as well as contract and procurement interaction.

Two **Research and Development projects** are proposed, the first to focus on e-democracy and public participation in the **planning process**, through the use of a combination of Geographic Information System (GIS)-based systems and Web technology. This would facilitate improvements in both the planning control and spatial planning roles of local government, and would use technology to both inform the public and planning applicants of the merits/demerits of particular applications and introduce three-dimensional and dynamic development plans. This would be a leading-edge software development project, and although initially proposed as a pilot project could, when proven, be applicable to all local authorities.

The second research and development project focuses on telecommunications, and the localised framework for delivery of **broadband services**. Again a pilot project approach is proposed, to test the feasibility of laying armoured fibre cabling throughout the sewer network bringing a broadband infrastructure into 90% of homes in Ireland. Obviously this would also have wide implications if it proves practical and feasible right across the country.

Land Registry

ITRIS - Integrated Title Registration Information System - is a major ICT based project to promote on-line services, including the searching of databases, folios and indices is scheduled to go live in July. E-payments will be incorporated when appropriate standards and technologies have been determined. Additional resources will be required to further advance this project.

Companies registration Office (CRO)

A further project is a web facility to allow Credit Unions to file their annual returns on-line. Phase one has commenced. Progression of phase two will depend on allocation of additional resources.

Dept. Education and Science.

The Department of Education and Science has prepared preliminary proposals for an initiative known as "Education and Training On-Line" (ETOL). This initiative would incorporate a number of components, such as a single, comprehensive website on the Education System, allowing second-level examination candidates to make applications and to view results electronically, facilitating on-line application for third-level courses, on-line application for grants, etc. ETOL would be implemented on a phased basis over a number of years.

Dept. Foreign Affairs

The Department of Foreign Affairs has identified two particular areas for delivery of electronic services, i.e. Consular Services particularly the Passport and Visa applications and an Information Service focusing on the expansion of publication of information on Ireland by the Department's offices abroad.

Consular Services

The Department issues over 300,000 passports per year to Irish citizens at home and abroad. The Department intends to replace the existing passport production system over the next two

years with the introduction of a digitised passport. The Department considers that the service would be enhanced if the application process could be effected electronically. This would involve a number of elements viz. downloading of application forms, scanning in of application details including personal signature and photograph (via an authorised network), receipt and checking of detail by the Passport Office, an electronic payment receipts system and electronic articulation of the application process with the new digitised system. As it is envisaged that most passport applications received by Embassies abroad will be processed at HQ, a secure Intranet incorporating our 54 Missions abroad and with the necessary scanning facilities will need to be developed.

An electronic visa application system is also envisaged. Additional financial and human resources will be required for these projects.

Information database

The Department is responsible for providing information to citizens and non-citizens on a wide range of services and (particularly abroad) on basic policy, statistical and other information on Ireland. It is essential that the Department, which can be the first point of contact for many non-citizens and businesses abroad, projects a high-tech image of Ireland in the increasingly information driven economies in which we operate. This objective can only be achieved by the development and ongoing maintenance of more interactive web sites both at Missions and HQ. This project will require additional resources.

GMS/Health Board

Projects envisaged (further details to be provided) include:-

GMS (Payments) Board

project allowing pharmacists to submit GMS Scheme claims electronically - currently involving 100 pharmacists - to be expanded aggressively

a National Client Eligibility Index - which will be available to Health Boards
Health Boards

a National Health Services Client Registration System

Dept. Justice, Equality & Law Reform

Development of a national criminal and subsequently civil case tracking system is underway. The first phase of the criminal system will go live at the end of July. The developments include active consideration of a significant number of process improvements including the possibility of electronic filing. The indications are that it is too early yet to develop this in current release but it is still an active option. The Courts Service web site has been developed and will be formally launched in the Autumn.

Following on from the Report of the Working Group on the Illegal and Harmful Use of the Internet, the Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform propose to put in place and resource services to deal with the downside issues associated with the Internet as part of the overall plans for addressing Information Society issues. These services would include research into issues identified by the Working Group, development and implementation of an awareness campaign designed to alert users about the dangers to children, input to content rating system. Consideration would also be given to making a funding contribution towards the new public hotline (to take complaints about illegal content of the Internet). Progress in this regard will necessitate additional resources.