

# Connecting with the customers

Graham Frankland, head of property services at Hartlepool Council, is enjoying the borough's involvement in NeSDS

**“W**e were delighted to be involved when we were asked to take a lead in developing the NeSDS project,” says Graham Frankland, head of property services at Hartlepool.

“Developing electronic services is high on our agenda in Hartlepool and we have already seen the benefits from the initial PARSOL e-planning service delivery standards in 2004, so taking the lead on the property e-standards stream now offers a great opportunity to build on and help define best practice.”

#### Top performers

As a consistent excellent performing local authority in the Audit Commission's comprehensive performance assessment ratings, the borough is proud of its proven success in delivering high quality services

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to its customers and Graham (inset) has a clear idea what the new e-standards will contribute.

“We strive to improve the consistency and coordination of all our property information. This project gives Hartlepool the opportunity to build on that progress, so we can really ‘make a difference’ both locally and nationally in the services we provide.

“The ‘electronic age’ of service provision is developing very quickly but there is a very real danger that finding piecemeal solutions to problems in different parts of the country could just confuse the very people who rely on and use council services most.

“The national standards will outline what a local authority property services department should look like, how it



management process. The profession as a whole needs to become more open and connected with its customers and the NeSDS project will provide an important vehicle to help realise this goal.

“It's all comes down to delivering top quality services and making sure they are open and easy for everyone to use. Happier customers, more contented elected members and more efficient property officers – it's a win, win all round,” he concludes.

#### The advantages

Graham believes quite firmly that the e-standards will bring measurable benefits to property services departments and have practical advantages for the staff who have to deal with the day to day operations.

“The national standards will provide a clear view of how property services should be e-enabled and provide a signposted route for future development based on the best practice across the country. The standards will provide a significant drive in achieving the priority outcomes for e government.

“Practitioners will be able to work with and develop common and consistent work processes to provide electronic access to property information and more efficient workflow. This information will be available at the ‘touch of a button’ releasing valuable officer time that can be concentrated on more effective day-to-day property management”

Graham is also keen to stress the important role that councils have played in developing the new national standards by drawing on their practical experience and best practice.

“We know what we are doing. We deliver property services every day at the “front-line” and have built up a real knowledge of our customers, what they want, how and when they want it.

“Some of us may do it better but we should share what we do best with our peer group for everyone's benefit – it is important for the success of e-standards that the ‘local authority’ angle is the driving force.

“Service standards need be built on practical understanding that makes a difference to the end users - local authorities are clearly best placed to draft and oversee the development of the benchmarks. After all it is the councils who are responsible for delivering all local services including national agendas!”



should work, who should be in it, what best practice work flows should be in place and what processes it should adopt.

“But they also have the potential to go further than that – it will not just be technical standards that will change, it will alter the whole cultural outlook and ways in which departments work.

“Developing more consistent standards creates opportunities for better working practices to be put in place so that local authorities can work together more closely to realise the potential efficiencies that can flow from providing services electronically.

“Over the past five years property professionals have been arguing the case for improved asset management planning and this emphasis has been reinforced by the whole comprehensive performance assessment process and now the need for councils to demonstrate more effective use of resources.

“Establishing common, but still demanding, service delivery standards should help improve the asset