



# Taking care with e-delivery

Michael Francis says Hertfordshire CC prides itself on its use of e-technology in adult care services

**F**rom the very first, Hertfordshire has been keen to develop and promote the use of the internet for providing information and for the delivery of its adult care services.

The county council has made sure that there is a considerable volume of information on adult care service on its specialist website -

[www.hertsdirect.org/acs](http://www.hertsdirect.org/acs) and was quick to realise the early potential of online publishing by putting all of its specialist information leaflets online, allowing people to order printed copies of them as and when required.

"We are keen to embrace new technologies throughout our organisation but we are also aware how important it is to leave the choice of how to access our information in the most appropriate manner to the people who use our services," explains Michael Francis.

"Our knowledge management strategy allows us to use shared content wherever possible for members of the public, internal department staff and for the people who run our customer service centre.

"One of the first interactive services we introduced was a 'contact us' facility allowing users to reach us 24/7 and we receive a great many e-mails and internet messages for care workers out of office hours - sometimes even from overseas family members," says Michael.

"We have a very diverse elderly set of client groups and we are very aware of how important the whole issue of accessibility is to our users.

"Recently we launched a specialist area of the website for people with disabilities ([www.hertsdirect.org/disability](http://www.hertsdirect.org/disability)) and worked with corporate colleagues to ensure the website is open and easily accessible for everyone who needs to use it.

"Using of tonal stripes and adjustable font sizes allows us to offer greater flexibility to meet the special needs of visually impaired users and we are hoping to publish new dedicated

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content for users whose first language is not English, very shortly."

Hertfordshire is currently working on ways to convert the Blue Badge application form into a downloadable form so that the service can be offered as a fully integrated online process. Staff are also busy developing online assessment and referral forms which are due to be available in early Autumn.

The county council has also developed a single client database for children, which is being refined and rolled out for Adult Care Services so that it integrates into a e-SAP (electronic single assessment) for families.

Staff are also being trained and

accredited in use of the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) so that they can use new systems and technologies more effectively.

Many social care workers have piloted the use of tablet PCs which may in time be used by all members of staff who visit clients and the county is also developing a range of electronic tools to improve and speed up internal work practices for services such as electronic booking for short stay beds postcode searches to identify local support teams alongside an assessment of the value of new technologies such as electronic pens.

As Head of Service Access for Adult Care Services to Children, Schools and Families, Michael is acutely aware of the added value new technology can bring to the people who need and rely on county services.

"The new national standards will allow us to benchmark our performance and encourage us to share best practice –but at the end of the day they are designed to help us deliver better quality more open and easy to use services – that's why they are important," he stresses.