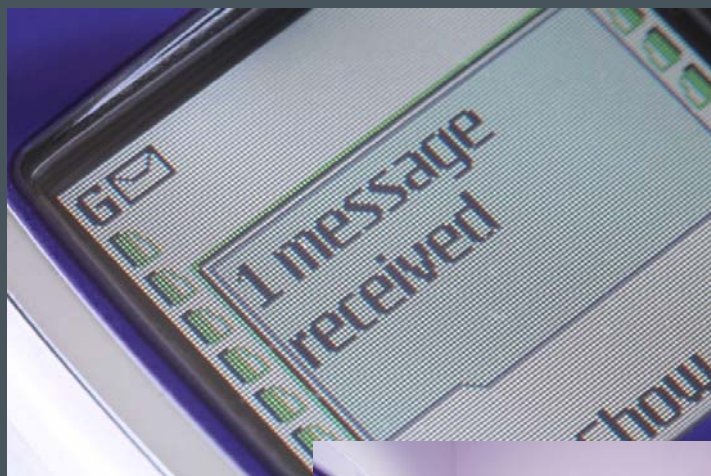


# Better information, better decisions, better services

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## Selecting services to be delivered electronically



A guide to demanding better information



# Contents

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**Part 1** – The purpose of the guide.

**Part 2** – Demanding better information: objectives, impact, assessing costs and understanding public opinion.

**Part 3** – Examples and case study.

# Selecting services to be delivered electronically

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## Part 1 – Purpose of the guide



# Do you need to make a decision about selecting services to be delivered electronically?

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## This guide is ...

- one of a series produced by the Audit Commission alongside the national report *Is there something I should know?* More information on the study and supporting toolkit can be found at [www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk)

## It is aimed at ...

- decision makers in councils: elected members, service directors and heads of service.

## It will help you ...

- specify the information you need when deciding whether a service, or an aspect of a service, is suitable for delivery through electronic means. Better information will help you make better decisions, which will lead to better, more effective services.

# Selecting services to be delivered electronically

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## Part 2 – Demanding better information

- Objectives
- Understanding impact
- Assessing costs and benefits
- The public



# The information that will help you

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## Clarity on your objectives

- Why is this an issue?
- What are you hoping to achieve?
- What are your constraints?

## Understanding impact

- What are the current levels of service use and performance?
- What would be the impact of delivering the service electronically?

## Assessing costs and benefits

- What do electronic services cost now?
- How do costs compare?

## Understanding the public

- What are the views of users and non-users?
- What impact will the options have on the public?

# Why is this an issue and what are you trying to achieve?

## Objectives

**Why is this an issue?**

- The public have problems accessing information about a service?
- The public have asked for extended opening hours for a service?
- There is a need to deliver cost savings in a service?

**What are you trying to achieve?**

- Better, more widely accessible information about a service.
- Longer opening hours for a service.
- Reduced costs and efficiency gains in a service.

**What are your constraints?**

- Government policy and targets.
- Wider council objectives.
- Budget.

# Understanding the **impact** of delivering a service electronically

Factors to consider	The data that will help	The analysis that is needed
<b>Current levels of service use and performance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current levels of use of the service.</li> <li>• Performance data for that service.</li> <li>• Comparative data on customer usage and performance from other, similar councils.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis of current users by:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- age;</li> <li>- gender;</li> <li>- ethnicity; and</li> <li>- geography.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Trend analysis of changes in use and performance over time.</li> <li>• Analysis of the problems people have accessing the service that may be impacting on service use and / or performance.</li> </ul>
<b>The impact of delivering that service electronically</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comparative data and case studies from other, similar councils that have delivered this service electronically.</li> <li>• Local historical data on the impact that electronic service delivery had on other areas of business for the council.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis of type and frequency of web traffic about this service, to gauge whether users are e-enabled.</li> <li>• Forecasts on whether delivering this service electronically is likely to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- increase numbers of users of that services; or</li> <li>- improve performance.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Forecast of the practicalities of delivering the service electronically, and an analysis of where problems may lie.</li> </ul>

# Hints and tips – Understanding the impact of the options

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## Bear in mind that ...



Effective, cheap and quick substitutes for poor data on service users are:

- a one-off sampling exercise of customer profiles; or
- an exercise to ask staff for their perceptions on patterns of service use and customer profiles.



There will rarely be perfect forecast data on the impact of delivering a service electronically. But it is better to have imperfect information to use as proxy to make judgements about the most appropriate and cost-effective options.



Not all services are suitable for delivery electronically, but there could be aspects of a service that it would be more cost effective and more user friendly, to make available online. For examples, a 'meals on wheels' service has to be delivered door-to-door and in person. However, the service could be ordered online, allowing greater flexibility in terms of menu selection and times of delivery.

# Assessing costs

Factors to consider	The data that will help	The analysis that is needed
<b>What it costs now</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The current cost of the service under consideration.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis to identify any areas where costs in that service are higher or lower than expected.</li> </ul>
<b>How costs compare</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost data and case studies from other, similar councils that illustrate the cost impact of delivering the service under consideration electronically.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis to illustrate how the costs of other services in your council have changed following the introduction of electronic services.</li> <li>• A forecast of the projected changes to costs if the service were delivered electronically.</li> <li>• If the service generates an income, projections should also be made on the expected impact in this area.</li> </ul>

# Hints and tips – Cost data

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## Bear in mind that ...



Forecasts of future costs and benefits will rarely be very accurate. They can, however, be accurate enough to guide decision making if:

- assumptions are tested with experienced local managers; and
- sensitivity analysis shows the consequences of inaccuracies.



Delivering a service electronically may reduce transactional costs. But it may also deliver other cost benefits that should be factored in, including:

- increased customer satisfaction; and
- increased income from higher service use.

# What about the **public**?

Factors to consider	The data that will help	The analysis that is needed
<b>Views of existing users and the profile of non-users you need to attract</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Views of existing users of the service.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identification of the non-users you wish to target and attract, with analysis of the benefits that each group could expect to see.</li> </ul>
<b>What impact will the proposals have on the public?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comparative data on satisfaction levels in similar councils, with similar community profiles, who have delivered this service electronically.</li> <li>• Data on how e-enabled the local population are, for example, data on broadband penetration and usage.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis and forecast of the impact of delivering the service electronically on current service users.</li> <li>• Analysis and forecast of the impact that an electronic service would have on different sections of the public.</li> <li>• Analysis of local historical data to establish the impact of electronic service delivery on public satisfaction levels.</li> </ul>

# Hints and tips – The public

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## Bear in mind that ...



Identifying non-users can be difficult:

- existing user data will be a good starting point;
- focus on the groups of non-users who you think would most benefit from an electronic service; and
- interview or survey a sample of this group to test your assumptions.



Effective and quick ways of obtaining information on the likely impact on the public are:

- interviews with a sample of service users on whether they would continue to use the service if it was delivered electronically;
- asking a sample of non-users why they do not use the service and what would be the best way of engaging them.

# Selecting services to be delivered electronically

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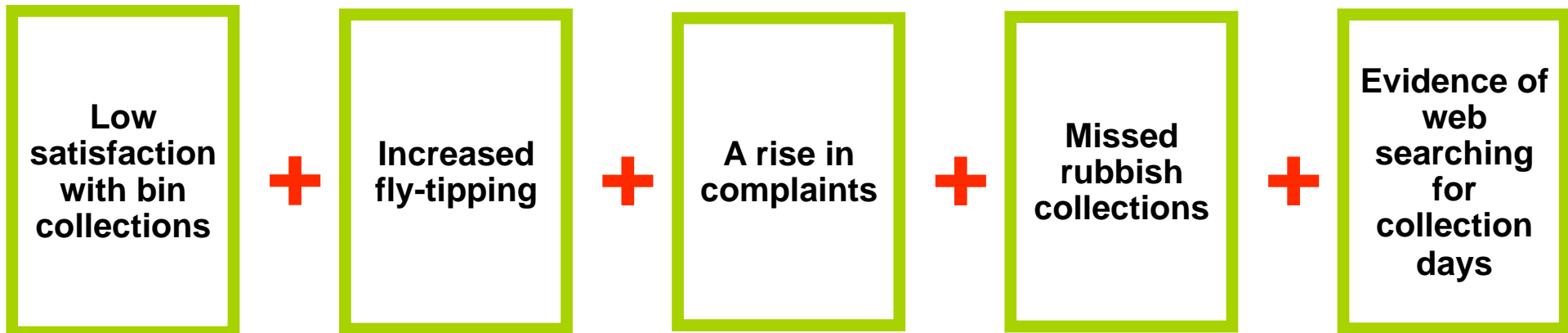
## Part 3 – Examples and case study



# Example – Combining insights to help make a decision

A range of evidence suggests that there is growing dissatisfaction with the local waste collection service.

Is there an electronic solution to this problem?



The electronic solutions included:

- adding a collection and recycling calendar to the website; and
- an offer of automated text reminders.

This resulted in high take-up of text messages, a decrease in missed collections, less complaints, reduced fly-tipping and fewer calls to the Council querying collection times.

# Example – Gathering evidence to test assumptions

A Council was unsure of the impact of delivering a service electronically. They thought that there was the potential for improved access to the service for the articulate, e-enabled middle classes, but there would be no benefits, and possible barriers, for more socially excluded groups. The council gathered evidence to test this assumption.

Council analysed which users would immediately benefit and which might be put off.

Historical data from the council indicated that when other services were delivered electronically, people who considered themselves 'time poor', like middle-class, young working parents, were slow to see time saving benefits of accessing services out of hours.



Council checked with similar authorities who had gone down the same road.

Data from other councils indicated that some socially excluded groups were very open to accessing services online.



Council ran trials and workshops with key groups.

Some of those with English as a second language and those with communication difficulties and memory difficulties found the user-controlled pace and written form of interaction more enabling.

Gathering a range of information enabled the council to test the assumptions that the council initially made. Delivering the service electronically enabled, rather than excluded, most socially excluded groups. The council offered the service online, confident that it met the needs of most users.

## Case study – Using e-services intelligently in Lewisham

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- Lewisham Borough Council wanted to improve the local environment by encouraging the public to report eyesores such as graffiti, potholes and poor pavements. Historical data indicated that local residents responded well to e-enabled services. Residents particularly engaged with services that enabled interaction via text messages.
- The Council implemented 'Love Lewisham'. This allows residents to send the Council images and comments for immediate action by Lewisham's operatives. Residents can send images and messages, using their camera phone, email or the 'Love Lewisham' website. The images can be of graffiti, fly-tipping, damaged pavements, potholes, lamp posts, abandoned vehicles or other elements of anti-social behaviour.
- Since introducing the e-enabled scheme:
  - ✓ graffiti is removed more quickly, which has meant that complaints about graffiti have fallen by 30%;
  - ✓ independent monitoring shows that the amount and frequency of graffiti observed has fallen by 8% between June 2007 and August 2009; and
  - ✓ the percentage of residents saying that the street cleaning service is 'good' or 'excellent', has risen by 18% since the scheme was introduced.