Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Geographic information strategy

Methodology

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This document provides a detailed description of the methodology used for the report on the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (the Department) geographic information strategy (HC 1274, Session 2011-12). A summarised methodology is at Appendix Three of the report.

1   This report evaluated whether the Department was achieving value for money from its geographic information strategy and activities. We did not examine how the Department was performing in leading the UK Location Programme.

2   We used our ICT framework[1] to structure our analysis and present our findings. It focused our evaluation on four main influences on value for money: policies and strategies, governance, operational uses and people.

The main elements of our methodology are set out below:

Call for evidence from eight geographic information users in the Department's policy teams and arm's length bodies

3   In December 2010 we invited users of geographic information and systems across the Department's policy teams and arm's length bodies to submit evidence to us about their involvement and experience of the Department's geographic information strategy. In order to provide flexibility, respondents were able to provide their feedback in written form or direct to us via telephone. We provided five high level themes to help respondents focus their response. These were:

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1   Comptroller and Auditor General, *Information and Communications Technology in Government: Landscape Review*, Session 2010-11, HC 757, National Audit Office, February 2011.

Theme	Respondents were asked to consider
Department's geographic information strategy 2009	awareness of the strategy
	involvement in its development and/or coordination of its delivery
	Department's coordination of the strategy
Services that the Department provide/have provided	effectiveness of these services supplying geographic information i.e. ease of access, timeliness, cost and training
Meeting your business need now and in the future	examples where geographic information services support current need
	examples where you need more specialised/tailored geographic information/systems
	how well the services will meet your future business need
Costs, benefits, efficiencies and savings made as a result of the geographic information strategy and services	examples where the Department's services have successfully lowered operational costs and/or resources
	additional costs of the strategy to your business
Changes or improvements	ideas about how you might make better use of geographic information to further improve your business processes

In January and February 2011 we received feedback from the following:

Department's policy teams	Food and Farming Group
	Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities Implementation team
	Veterinary Imports, Policy, Evidence, Risk and Surveillance team
Arm's length bodies	Animal Health
	Food and Environment Research Agency
	Forestry Commission England
	Natural England
	Rural Payments Agency

Case study visits to two arm's length bodies

4   In January 2011, we visited two of the Department's arm's length bodies, the Environment Agency and the Marine Management Organisation. The purpose of these case study visits was to help the study team understand how geographic information is used in the day-to-day delivery of services. The visit involved presentations from the case study bodies outlining the uses of geographic information in their business and included discussions with senior staff responsible for the delivery of geographic information following the presentations.

5   The case studies were chosen in consultation with the Department. The Marine Management Organisation was chosen because it is one of the newest bodies of the Department (established April 2010) which has unique requirements for geographic information in the coastal zone. It faces complex challenges for sourcing and analysing geographic data. The Environment Agency was chosen because it has well established geographic information requirements. The Agency has a high level of expertise and its own specialist geographic information team.

Interviews with the Department and key stakeholders

6   In January 2011 we interviewed six staff from the Department's Data Sharing Programme and a number of stakeholders using semi-structured interviews. The purpose of the interviews was to understand the services the Department delivered as well as wider context around geographical information.

- Association of Geographic Information
- Astrium GEO-Information Services
- British Computing Society
- Department for Communities and Local Government
- Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Data Sharing Programme
- Esri
- IBM
- The Land Registry
- Ordnance Survey
- The UK Hydrographic Office
- University of Nottingham

Document review

7 We requested a number of documents from the Department to help us understand how the geographic information strategy was being governed, delivered and its progress. These documents included:

- Minutes of meetings from governance groups

- Review of financial information provided by the Department including spreadsheets, invoices and quotes

- Business cases for funding for geographic information services

- Utilisation data and user feedback for the geographic information services provided by the Department

- Departmental policy documents on geographic information, data sharing and data standards

- Contracts between the Department and its suppliers

- Memorandum of Understanding between the Department's Data Sharing Programme and the Information Services teams

- Department's strategy documents relating to geographic information and information technology

- Wider government documents including the 2008 Pitt Review of the 2007 floods, the 2002 Anderson Review of the 2001 Foot and Mouth outbreak and the 2011 Government ICT strategy

- Wider geographic information papers written by or for the Association of Geographic Information and the Local Government Association

Technology review

8 We reviewed a number of technical documents and interviewed suppliers of the IT and geographic information services. This included:

- Enterprise Architecture diagrams

- Geographic information strategy technology documents

- Business cases for funding

- Minutes of meetings/correspondence between the Department and its suppliers

- Demonstration of geographic information systems and applications during case study visits

- Interviews with IBM, Esri and Astrium GEO-Information Services