



'Time poor' citizens deserve a rapid response,

The Association for Public Service Excellence, today welcomed the launch of the Connect to Your Council campaign. Paul O'Brien Chief Executive of APSE said:

"Technology will ensure that councillors can intervene where services are not being satisfactorily delivered. The use of internet access to connect with councils and councillors should be used to reinvigorate local democracy. The role of the ward councillor remains as important today as ever but we need new ways to ensure that citizens can engage in service delivery and development.

Technology ought to help prevent the populist headline grabbing misconception about the role of Elected Members. Councillors and councils have recognised the 'Inbox' has replaced the 'soap box'. The internet is a valid and modern way to connect with communities and respond to their needs". He added, **'The connect to your council campaign is an excellent initiative. What it highlights is that council websites are amongst the best leaving behind many private sector companies and indeed government departments'**. Mr O'Brien, however, went on to state that whilst the e-gov initiatives have been a resounding success, with councils often exceeding targets in making services available remotely, it was important that the services were available to all citizens by promoting access well beyond home computing. He added **'The newly formed Department for Communities and Local Government has a much broader remit to tackle social exclusion. Local authorities taking up the challenge to make economic prosperity and social inclusion as part of their neighbourhood strategies must continue to develop delivery of e-access to council services through libraries, housing offices and even supermarkets. We also need to ensure that in enabling citizens we do not exclude some of the most deprived areas of the face to face contact with the council which is so often under-valued in the rush to deliver efficient services'**.

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Notes

1. The Connect to your Council Campaign was launched by Government on the 11th May 2006.
2. The take-up campaign will use a range of services available online to encourage people to use their local council website as the first port of call when doing everyday chores, such as finding information on rubbish collection or paying bills.
3. Many councils will utilise websites to encourage use of new powers such as Abandoned vehicle removal following on from the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act.
4. Research has shown that council services in England are among the best in Europe, though currently underused. However, latest figures also highlight that online services are proving increasingly popular with over 13 million people now visiting council websites each month. The campaign will aim to capitalise on this interest and encourage further take up.
5. The campaign strap line is 'connect to your council'. People going to the campaign URL at www.direct.gov.uk/my council will only need to enter a post code, or town or street name, to be taken directly to the relevant service page of the local council website.
6. Visits to council websites are currently running at 13 million per month. Over 156 million are anticipated over the next year.

7. Britain has sophisticated online services by international standards. A study of public services online published last year by the European Union found that the UK's were the most sophisticated at serving the citizen in any of the countries studied.

8. A report by independent consultants Site Confidence showed many local authority websites in England ahead of FTSE100 companies in terms of reliability and speed (<http://www.localgov.gov.uk/ieg>)

9. Two-thirds of UK homes are connected to the internet and there are over 10 million broadband connections. The majority of families can use local government services online

About APSE

1. APSE is the Association for Public Service Excellence

2. APSE is a not for profit organisation working with over 300 councils throughout the UK.

3. For further information / to arrange an interview contact Mark Roden on 0161 772 1810 mroden@apse.org.uk or Mo Baines on 07971 843515 mbaines@apse.org.uk

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