

## Public Audit Forum

# News Release

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A Paper by the Public Audit Forum

### **Audit Implications of Electronic Service Delivery in the Public Sector**

Electronic service delivery need not lead to a loss of accountability, a paper by the Public Audit Forum said today. This paper, which has been revised since it was first published in 2001, sets out the audit implications of the electronic service delivery systems envisaged in the Modernising Government Agenda and aims to support both auditors and management involved in electronic service delivery developments with basic advice. It points out that, for example, delivering services over electronic networks does not result in new audit objectives, but does lead to new risks that need to be addressed by management and identified by auditors.

Sir John Bourn, chairman of the Public Audit Forum said,

**"This is a fast moving area. This revised paper explains the main audit implications of electronic service delivery and provides advice on addressing them. I commend it to public sector auditors and managers involved in taking forward this aspect of the provision of public services."**

Sarah Tyacke, Keeper of Public Records and Historical Manuscripts Commissioner said,

**"Effective electronic records management is the essential underpinning of electronic service delivery. By 2004 all newly created public records must be able to be electronically stored and retrieved. This paper raises many important issues that public bodies need to address. We, at the National Archives, are working closely with organisations, providing advice and guidance to help them achieve the 2004 target".**

The paper sets out:

- how electronic service delivery affects audit;
- the relevance of information security standards to audit evidence;
- what auditors need to do in response to electronic service delivery.

It also includes examples of the different security mechanisms that can be used to protect data and provides information on risk areas that are particularly relevant to electronic service delivery and the controls auditors expect clients to employ.

It builds on a number of the themes raised in the Forum's earlier paper '*Implications for Audit of the Modernising Government Agenda*'. This stressed the need for auditors to support and encourage worthwhile change while maintaining the need for financial discipline. It also emphasised the importance of co-operative working between auditors.

In this paper the Forum again encourages auditors to embrace change by adopting an audit approach that reflects the changed risks introduced by electronic service delivery. It notes the contribution that can be made to the audit of 'joined up' electronic service delivery by the adoption of common approaches that enable auditors to work together more easily and take account of each other's work. It also calls on auditors to ensure that their professional knowledge enables them to understand the strengths and weaknesses of controls in an electronic service delivery context. And it highlights guidance produced by the National Archives, the new amalgamation of the Public Record Office and the Historical Manuscripts Commission, to help public bodies develop their own detailed specifications for electronic records management systems.

#### **NOTES TO EDITORS:**

The Public Audit Forum, which was established in 1998, represents the six national audit agencies: National Audit Office; Audit Commission; Auditor General for Scotland; Accounts Commission for Scotland; Auditor General for Wales and the Northern Ireland Audit Office. The Forum's overall aim is to provide a focus for developmental thinking about public audit.

The Public Audit Forum has a remit to build on the existing co-operation between the public audit agencies, to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of public audit, to provide a strategic focus on issues cutting across their work and to develop common standards for public audit. This paper was prepared by a consultative forum that draws on the experience and expertise of public auditors, the bodies they audit, the auditing profession and the wider community.

This paper, and other information about the Forum, is available on its web site at [www.public-audit-forum.gov.uk](http://www.public-audit-forum.gov.uk).

The National Archives, the former Public Record Office, have responsibility for advising and guiding departments to achieve the 2004 electronic records management target and for monitoring their progress. Further information and guidance is available on the National Archives website at [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk)

The Public Audit Forum welcomes comments on its paper. These may be sent to the Public Audit Forum Secretariat, B361, 157-197 Buckingham Palace Road, Victoria, London SW1W 9SP or comments may be emailed to [david.corner@nao.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:david.corner@nao.gsi.gov.uk)

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