www.defencemanagement.com
in association with Defence Management Journal

SEARCH [   ] Submit

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND SECURITY - DEFENCE MANAGEMENT JOURNAL, ISSUE 32

So far so good

Michael Harte talks to John Taylor, Director General Information at the MOD, about the Defence Information Infrastructure programme.

John Taylor has been Director General Information in the Ministry of Defence for five years and has been interviewed for DMJ on several occasions; each time, he seems able to report real progress towards the MOD's information goals. This March was no exception, as I found out when I met him in one of the small MOD conference rooms. Before addressing his main responsibility – the Defence Information Infrastructure (DII) programme – we ran briefly over one or two other parts of his empire where progress has been made in the last 12 months.

First, Taylor set out the MOD's progress in implementing the Freedom of Information Act (FOI). The MOD forecast of demand volume had been found to be broadly right. The tool sets that the Department had put in place, with over 1,200 practitioners trained to implement the Act correctly coupled with a significant effort to promote staff awareness, had enabled the MOD to manage this new task effectively. The FOI was seen as a corporate change programme and the investment has paid dividends. Some challenges were a little tougher than expected: the customer base for FOI – journalists, broadcasters and the general public – was proving more sophisticated than expected but MOD targets of responding to 85% of enquiries within the stipulated timeframe had been exceeded in the last quarter of 2005.

Moving on, good progress had been made with travel management: a corporate modernisation programme was under way. Spending some £280m a year on travel, the MOD needed to find ways of making significant reductions: over £20m a year of savings have already been achieved. In MOD Main Building, there is a central travel service allowing individuals to book hire cars, air travel, rail tickets and hotel rooms online. John commented: "This is demonstrating an overall efficiency – for air travel, 15% hard savings are being achieved through individuals being able to see the full range of ticket possibilities available to them." The service is run in-house by the Defence Passenger Reservation Centre in St. George's Court with modern IT; within Main Building, ticket machines are available to provide any necessary paperwork before individuals leave for their travels. A real benefit has been the role that the new online travel service plays as part of the MOD's main change programme to achieve different ways of doing business.

Turning to the DII, with a budget over the totality of the programme of some £4bn, it is hardly surprising that Taylor finds this his major challenge. The contract for DII[Future] was signed in March 2005 – with the ATLAS consortium, led by EDS with Fujitsu as a tier 1 partner to provide commercial resilience. Although a huge challenge both to Taylor and his organisation, as Senior Responsible Owner making sure that the MOD is ready for the DII, and the IPT under DCSA negotiating the contract, almost all milestones to date have been hit precisely. After contract signature, the first challenge for ATLAS was to ramp up the core bid team of around 150 to a strength of nearer 1,600 by the end of 2005. On time, on 1st August 2005, vesting day resulted in the novation of existing MOD contracts for IT services to the ATLAS consortium and the transfer under TUPE of 124 MOD posts.

The next key milestone was the establishment of the 'single point of contact' with a single helpdesk for all transferred IT services; this went live some three weeks later than planned – in mid-November. Next was the 'first user live' on the new DII system: this occurred at the end of January 2006 at Copenacre where a number of IPT staff are now trialling the new system. The significance of this, as John explained, is not the number of users on the new system: "This was only the tip of the iceberg – underneath, we have the two tier 1 data centres up and running, one in Micheldene and one in Boddington, with the necessary low latency links established between the two. The DII[F] programme is being used to achieve a substantial improvement in the resilience of the MOD's IT infrastructure." This was also important to test the underpinning communications network, procured under the Defence Fixed Telecommunications Service from BT. This showed that not only was the link between the IPT and ATLAS working well but also that the commercial relationship between ATLAS and BT was in good health. BT got the high-speed links up and running ahead of schedule. John added: "When we let the DII[F] contract, we also extended the DFTS contract to 2015 to align the provision of the wide area network to that of the IT infrastructure provision."

On programmes of this size, government departments are required to seek independent assurance that the project is being implemented in a proper manner. The Office of Government Commerce was therefore invited to carry out a gateway 'readiness for service' review, which they did in January and awarded an overall green assessment. For Taylor, this fully justified the investment ahead of contract award, which really paid dividends in terms of hitting early milestones.

Considerable effort has gone into refining the overall roll-out sequence for DII across the MOD. The first 'real' users – after members of the IPT at Copenacre – should go live late in March, when two TA centres at Alnwick and Farnham will start using DII in anger; DMJ hopes to report on their experience in a subsequent issue. By early May, some 15 smaller sites will be equipped; this will provide an essential test of the management processes because a roll-out on the scale planned cannot succeed without an industrial strength factory process – the MOD is sure that that is in place but needs to confirm its effectiveness before the major roll-out starts in July 2006; 3,000-4,000 workstations will be installed each month. This will be the next big test for ATLAS – within Increment 1, there are over 600 sites, some small but some very large with several thousand users. Taylor said that Increment 1 is fully approved and fully

funded, apart from profile management and other MOD in-year financial adjustments. The challenge of roll-out is, as John put it, "equal to fitting out two buildings the size of Main Building every month by the end of the year".

In fact, MOD Main Building will receive DII[F] towards the end of the Increment 1 roll-out: this is partly because it was re-equipped with a modern IT infrastructure as part of the refurbishment programme – but by July 2007, the desktop infrastructure will be over three years old and ready for replacement.

As DII is deployed, users at desk level will move from a single user way of working to a more collaborative approach – a major change in working practice as users in Main Building are already finding, with substantial gains in performance. The underlying differences of resilience and security will be substantial for all users – but should not be noticeable to them; support levels will also be higher than for most legacy systems.

DII is also essential to support the wide range of change programmes that are progressively coming into Service: these will impact at desk level in a very significant way. The civilian HR People programme will come online in stages over the next 12 months; the Joint Personnel Administration Programme will start coming on-stream for the RAF in March/April; and, after that, for the Royal Navy and later for the Army. Similar progress is being made in other areas – JAMES [Joint Asset Management and Engineering System] is being enabled by DII; MMIT [Management of Materials in Transit] is another example.

In parallel with the Increment 1 programme, an assessment phase is being run for Increment 2 to cover more of the fixed infrastructure and into the deployed space. Submissions are planned to the Investment Approvals Board later this year.

Concluding, John's overall message was: "So far so good – the DII is now poised to deliver but one of the critical success factors will be the readiness of the user community. A joint user working group is active to ensure that the inevitable issues can be properly managed: there are DII champions covering all parts of the organisation, committed to DII – at TLB level, they are at two or even three star level."