



**Abstract**

### **Background & Brief**

Proposals to undertake an "eCabinet" project were approved by Government in April 2000. PwC were retained last autumn for the 1st phase of the project and given the brief to research current practices and procedures and also the potential applications of modern communications technologies to the Cabinet process. Specifically we were asked to address a number of aspects of the Cabinet process, in particular:-

- Electronic distribution and management of Cabinet papers
- Use of technologies in direct support of Cabinet meetings
- Use of technologies to improve presentation of complex issues at Cabinet
- Creation of new information resources.

The project was also driven by the Government's desire to lead by example in progressing the Information Society in Ireland.

### **Objective & Approach**

Our first objective was to analyse and understand the existing Cabinet process. Through consultation with the Cabinet Secretariat, and other key stakeholders we documented current practices and procedures – the workflows are set out in the appendices. We researched best practice both nationally and internationally and the available technology tools which might beneficially be applied to the Cabinet process. Our research and consultation focused on identifying the opportunities for deploying best available technologies to support the Cabinet process to maximise the potential to achieve the objectives of the brief. Having sketched out a "vision" of how an electronic model (e-Cabinet) might function, and the benefits and potential it offered, we then engaged in a process of consultation with key stakeholders. The key stakeholders comprised a representative selection of Cabinet Ministers and Secretaries General of Government departments. These consultations proved invaluable and we took account of the suggestions made and issued raised in refining our vision for the new model. Presentations were subsequently made to Cabinet and to Secretaries General on the emerging model and any further points made were taken into account.

### **Current process**

The current Cabinet processes work well and are efficient within the current regime. However, it is clear that further efficiencies together with enhancements and new functionality can be achieved by applying modern communications technologies to the process. Currently the Cabinet process is paper based. Large volumes of paper (in excess of 1.2 million A4 sheets) are processed each year. Memoranda are circulated manually for meetings, the meetings themselves are paper based – with Ministers bringing on average 4.75 kilos of paper to a typical meeting. Follow up, including circulation of decisions and outcomes after each meeting, is also a paper-based process.

### **Analysis**

The full potential to utilise technologies to add efficiencies and improve effectiveness has yet to be realised. Modern technologies offer the potential to circulate the necessary documentation more efficiently, faster and more securely. Electronic dissemination and storage of documentation would offer significant benefits, not least in document management, search and retrieval. The potential also exists to harness technologies such as workflow and document management to automate processes and to assist Departmental staff in authoring Memoranda and to enhance the presentation of information to Ministers to assist them in the decision making process. Authoring tools could also contribute to qualitative improvements in memoranda authoring.

## **The Vision**

The electronic model we propose would impact on the pre and post meeting environments as well as at the Cabinet table itself.

### **Pre meeting**

- Memoranda would be authored using an XML based authoring tool to be deployed in all Departments. This tool will incorporate a template type approach which will influence the structure of memoranda according to the different memoranda types.
- Resultant Memoranda would be electronically transmitted to Cabinet Secretariat from a secure point of access in each department.
- Once approved for the agenda by Cabinet Secretariat the agenda item will be visible in real time to all departments as part of an evolving agenda.
- Consultation between departments in furnishing observations on Memoranda will be facilitated electronically.

### **Cabinet Meeting**

- Each Minister will have his/her own touch screen terminal at the Cabinet table from which s/he will be able to access all relevant documentation. There will also be a central agenda monitor to track progress during the meeting, i.e. displaying the agenda items under discussion at any particular time.
- The agenda will be viewable by each Minister at his/her own terminal and at the touch of the screen the Minister can access each item and within each memo can drill down to the various elements of interest.
- Each Minister will have the option of having his/her screen customised to suit their own preferences – including how they wish to have the overviews of the Memoranda presented to them.
- Ministers will be able to electronically receive (on a personal and confidential basis) briefing on agenda items from their own departments.
- Facilities for e-Mail communication will be available to Ministers from their terminals
- Ministers will have the facility to make presentations or to use graphics or multimedia (this functionality can also be assisted by an officer of Cabinet Secretariat).

### **Post Meeting**

- Decisions will be communicated electronically.
- Each Department will have access to an electronic database with decisions sent to it by Cabinet Secretariat to facilitate subsequent monitoring and follow up
- Certain post meeting procedures can be conducted electronically (e.g. gazetting in Iris Oifigúil, advice to the President to exercise functions)
- New information resources can be created, in collaboration with Departments as required e.g. creation of electronic appointments registers

## **Recommendations**

We are recommending the e-Cabinet model outlined above. As there is no single product which can provide this, we are recommending that it be based on the combined application of various technologies currently available. Full details are set out in the relevant chapter, but in summary these are:- an XML authoring tool with integrated user help facility, a workflow/process automation tool, an e-Meeting and learning tool, together with appropriate security products.

Training for all users of the system, including Ministers, will be crucial to the successful implementation of e-Cabinet and we have suggested how best to approach this.

### **Security**

It is recognised that security is a key issue in the operation of the Cabinet system. Our recommendations on how to provide for and ensure security of the highest standard, including measures to provide for tracability of all material accessed or printed are set out in a separate confidential report.

### **Implementation**

We are recommending that the implementation phase be divided into components specifically:- Implementation planning, model implementation, security implementation – all of which would involve project management, QA, training and change management. The implementation planning phase (next phase) should involve identifying the procurement approach to be taken, the change programme to be followed and decisions as to how the various components should be divided up to facilitate going to market for implementation. We have set out in this report how we would suggest the project could best be structured into different work packages.

### **Costs & Timescale**

Based on the assumptions we have set out, we estimate that the Cabinet Secretariat costs for the implementation of the e-Cabinet model, including hardware, software and implementation services would be £2.68m (€3.4m). The full costs are outlined in full detail in Chapter 6, however we would point out that, as components such as the security solution and XML authoring tool will also be the basis of other systems it is not appropriate to apportion all of these costs solely to e-Cabinet.

Assuming the implementation phase of the project, which involves going to market, commences early 2002, we would envisage that implementation should be in progress early 2003.

### **The Benefits of eCabinet**

- Electronic dissemination will speed up communications and provide efficiencies not possible in a manual system
- Officials will benefit from the template and inbuilt guidance and Cabinet Handbook procedure provisions in authoring memoranda
- The use of the XML authoring tool, by ensuring its applicability for other purposes, such as legislation drafting and publishing/ content management for on-line resources, will yield valuable economies of scale.
- There should be a qualitative improvement in the presentation and content of memoranda with greater clarity of key issues.
- Electronic document management will improve the consultation process at memo drafting stage, as it is more conducive to dynamic dialogue.
- Ministers will have the information they need presented to them in ways which suit them best and will benefit from improved document structure including hypertext functionality.
- Real time access to the agenda as it is being compiled will afford departments more time to study and address the issues and or prepare briefing.
- The system will facilitate use of multimedia and illustrations to assist presentation of complex issues at Cabinet.
- Decisions can be communicated more speedily after Government meetings.
- The substantial volume of paper necessary for the Cabinet process will be greatly reduced.
- Workflows will be quicker and more efficient
- A comprehensive electronic archive will result, facilitating the creation of new information resources.
- Improved communication with Ministers and departments will result.