



Scottish Executive, Justice Department

LINETS Project

EVALUATION OF THE PILOT STAGE

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 The Pilot Stage of the LINETS Project concluded at the end of February 2001. It was critically important at that time to make an objective assessment both of the user's view of the Project and any benefits gained by them during Pilot life. When consolidated these individual opinions were expected to provide the basis for justifying the management and financial approval needed to continue LINETS as a full service for all members of the public sector Justice Community.
- 1.1.2 This formal assessment therefore provided the opportunity for project management to solicit views on usefulness, content, service and a number of other factors. All Pilot site users were asked to complete a standard questionnaire, the consolidated content of which forms the basis of this Report. Report content will be used both to support expenditure beyond Pilot life and to provide evidence for Ministers to reach a decision on LINETS future ownership and management.

1.2 Aim

- 1.2.1 The aim of this Report is to present the consolidated findings from the formal evaluation of the LINETS Project Pilot Stage. The final Section contains the conclusions drawn from the findings, together with a recommendation for further action.

1.3 Participation

- 1.3.1 The findings in this Report are derived from questionnaire-supplied information received from the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, Police Services, High and Sheriff Courts including the Office of the Lord President, the Scottish Courts Service, District Courts, the Scottish Executive, The Scottish Police College, the Headquarters of the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2.1 Resume

- 2.1.1 The LINETS Project, dually funded by the Scottish Executive and HM Treasury's ISB Programme, completed its six-month evaluation period at the end of February 2001.
- 2.1.2 A formal survey of users participating in the Project has provided ample evidence to justify continuing with LINETS. As a 'joined-up' government initiative it provides a valuable asset for the Justice Community and demonstrates the success of a single Portal approach when seeking information from dispersed Web sources.
- 2.1.3 Levels of system use have significantly grown over the evaluation period, reaching a reasonable level of stability in November 2000. Since then good practice in usage has improved, with the ratio of information retrieved to search request showing that individuals are improving their personal PC skills.
- 2.1.4 Many examples of beneficial use were quoted. Perhaps the most recent is that of the senior Grampian Police Officer requiring details of delegation of powers under the Animal Health Act to deal with the current emergency. LINETS provided the answer in two minutes.
- 2.1.5 All contributors spoke highly of projects services and staff, and made particular note of the considerable savings in time and effort gained from LINETS. The fact that the wide range of information offered was available on the desktop, through a single portal, avoided many time-wasting, fact-seeking exercises. This benefit alone fully justifies continuing with LINETS and indeed further developing available services.
- 2.1.6 The Project Board and Management Team will act upon several useful suggestions for further development in coming months. Not least is the creation of hypertext links between related items, such as legislation and case law. These tasks will be planned and undertaken in concert with the active User Group.
- 2.1.7 The assimilation of commercial databases into the latter half of the Pilot has been an unqualified success. Lawtel, the Stair Memorial Encyclopaedia and Westlaw are all widely used and their continuance in LINETS is only constrained by financial issues.
- 2.1.8 The consultant unreservedly recommends that LINETS be allowed to continue operating as a System Service on behalf of the Justice Community in Scotland, albeit to a much larger user population.

3. ASSESSMENT OF REALISED BENEFITS

3.1 Introduction

- 3.1.1 The individual questionnaires submitted by the Pilot Site user population were used to provide the assessments given below. Each Sub-Section provides a resume of corresponding entries in the standard questionnaire format.
- 3.1.2 Individual user responses have been retained at the LINETS Project Office and may be inspected following agreement with the Project Manager.

3.2 Frequency of Use

- 3.2.1 In general terms the majority of users accessed LINETS on a daily basis, particularly where several individuals have access to a single PC. Where a single individual was concerned, in some cases the access was reported on a weekly basis. In all situations the time spent on LINETS was significant, ranging from several minutes to hours.
- 3.2.2 These general conclusions on usage are supported by the system statistics taken by LINETS System Administration. Using samples taken during stable periods of operation in November 2000 and February 2001 the average number of monthly requests made to the system for information were in the order of 28,500. These submissions led to the generation of about 13,500 pages of electronic output per month.

3.3 User Numbers

- 3.3.1 During the latter period of Pilot operation the number of user sites has stabilised at about 35, increasing from the original 24 at the outset of operation in September 2000. This growth was agreed by the Project Board in the interests both of the Justice Community and of future growth potential outside the public sector.
- 3.3.2 The actual number of individuals using the system, based on reported figures, is at least eighty. This aligns reasonably well with the frequency of use and information output numbers provided above.

3.4 Changes in Working Practices

- 3.4.1 While many users did not record any changes in working practices it is significant that those who did noted a reduction in reference to published material, the availability of facts not previously to hand, and the ability to work at the desktop rather than having to visit or refer to library sources.
- 3.4.2 These notes indicate the cardinal points of value in LINETS, in that it is available at the desktop, provides a single portal to a wide range of information and presents a valuable opportunity for cutting down the time spent on research.
- 3.4.3 Taking a very recent practical example, the Temporary Assistant Chief Constable of Grampian Police needed to know details regarding the delegation of powers under the Animal Health Act to deal with the current emergency regarding food and animal

disease. LINETS provided the answer in two minutes, indicating the power available to change working practice once the system distributed and operational.

3.5 System Usage

- 3.5.1 The greater majority of system usage was to obtain information on Statutes, Statutory Instruments, Case Law, Opinions, Instructions, Circulars and general legal information contained in the many sources accessible through LINETS.
- 3.5.2 Where usage was less than anticipated this was generally due to inexperience of newly connected staff.

3.6 Dependency on LINETS

- 3.6.1 While many did not feel their work was dependent upon LINETS most expressed a strong view about its value in supporting their daily tasks. Examples quoted included the following:
 - ?? Information available from commercial databases is not readily available elsewhere;
 - ?? Convenience and considerable savings in time when carrying out legal research;
 - ?? In some cases, the sole source for access to Community documentation such as PINS, Circulars and others;
 - ?? Invaluable linkage to other Criminal Justice Organisations (CJOs);
 - ?? Usefulness in speeding up drafting through direct references to source material.
- 3.6.2 No Pilot site user expressed any negative comments about LINETS; all made positive statements as to its actual or potential value in their professional lives.

3.7 Satisfaction with System Services

- 3.7.1 Most users expressed superlatives about system services, noting the valued contributions made by Project staff in ensuring the success of the Pilot.
- 3.7.2 Attention is drawn to the fact that in the six months under examination no software faults have been encountered. This points both to the quality of the initial requirements analysis, to which Justice Community professionals made a significant contribution, and the software engineering carried out by Edina Software Limited under contract.

3.8 Benefits Gained

- 3.8.1 Pilot site users all recognised that LINETS offered actual and potential benefits of a considerable order. These were evident as savings in the following exemplary areas:
 - ?? Checking legislation for operational tasks;
 - ?? Researching legal situations in many business areas;

- ?? Gaining access to material not previously available in the business area being reported;
 - ?? Using the powerful, wide-ranging search function effective both within LINETS and across the Web;
 - ?? Employing the single LINETS portal to access diverse groups of information rather than performing multiple requests through a Web Browser.
- 3.8.2 The evaluation has shown that these and other similar benefits amount to considerable savings in time and effort. These in turn enable increases in work throughput as well as generating valuable savings in time at judicial and administrative levels.
- 3.8.3 Potential savings in the future have not gone unrecognised in the Community. For example, Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary is fully supportive of LINETS as an effective tool both in his own organisation and for police services in general.
- 3.8.4 Some economy savings in printing and publishing were noted by several of the reporting users.

3.9 Information Not Used

- 3.9.1 Taking the Pilot sites as a whole all of the Community Domain and commercially supplied information is seen as useful, contributing directly to the work of the Justice Community. Suggestions made included the need for more information to be contributed by Community members, with particular mention being made of the Crown Office, which was said to have submitted little to date.
- 3.9.2 A number of commentators mentioned that little use was made of Web Sites accessed through LINETS containing English and Welsh law information.

3.10 Information Desired

- 3.10.1 While most users were mainly satisfied with the range of information available, they following items were seen as desirable and of direct relevance to professional tasks:
- ?? Scottish Criminal and Civil Case Reports and related indexes;
 - ?? Hypertext linkage between legislation and related Case Law;
 - ?? Crown Office Book of Regulations;
 - ?? Access through Scottish Executive and other Intranet-based departmental desktop systems;
 - ?? Road Traffic Law;
 - ?? Hansard;
 - ?? Sweet & Maxwell's CLI;
 - ?? Lexus-Nexus;
 - ?? Directories within the Community and similar helpful material.
- 3.10.2 The Project Team will pursue some of the above items during the post-Pilot stage, subject to Project Board approval and financial viability.

3.11 Areas for Improvement

- 3.11.1 The only improvements suggested, in addition to those noted above under “desired Information”, related to simplification of the sign-on process and a review of the Web Site Home Page design.
- 3.11.2 Security considerations make it difficult to simplify the SecureDial process, which will continue to exist throughout Project life wherever access is required away from a suitable Intranet. The access method from GSI-type networks, to be used by the bulk of the expected new population, will be much simpler by calling for user-id and password only.
- 3.11.3 The Project Management Team will take up a further comment on the provision of better training in system usage, particularly where commercial information packages are involved.

3.12 Most Useful Facilities

- 3.12.1 The list of facilities found most useful by the populace included the following, not in priority sequence:
 - ?? The Statute Law Database;
 - ?? Westlaw, Lawtel and the Stair Memorial Encyclopaedia;
 - ?? The supplied Search facility;
 - ?? The PINS system;
 - ?? The Scottish Courts Web Site;
 - ?? Court decisions and opinions;
 - ?? HMSO, Human Rights and other European Community data.

3.13 Functions Not Used

- 3.13.1 Apart from the above-mentioned English/Welsh Web Sites, and several Pilot sites not using the supplied E-mail facility, no others were mentioned.
- 3.13.2 Use of the LINETS E-mail facility is expected to improve once access to GSI-type networks is fully enabled.

3.14 Change Requirements

- 3.14.1 The need for improved and better quality content to be supplied by the Justice Community was the only change requirement raised by a number of users.

3.15 Links to Other Systems

- 3.15.1 In addition to connection with GSI-type Intranets a need for interaction with Health and Social Work authority systems was registered.

3.16 Impact if LINETS Discontinued

- 3.16.1 While contributors felt that they would cope without LINETS most felt this was a negative step, with considerable loss of real benefits and a reversion to difficulties in acquiring information resources.
- 3.16.2 This reaction is to be expected. LINETS is an information portal, designed to render data to users as quickly as possible and at a reasonable cost. As no data is processed within LINETS (unlike, say, an ISCJIS system processing police reports) the impact on the user is not immediate, but would be in any event a retrograde step.
- 3.16.3 The strategic effect of discontinuance is more alarming. With LINETS the Justice Community possesses a nucleus for further developing a legal knowledge base for themselves, through the use of practical hypertext linkage, the advanced search feature and algebra capable of expressing user requests for information. Such a requirement cannot be met from the commercial market place at the present time, but with LINETS the Scottish public sector have the wherewithal to undertake such a step now.

3.17 Use of Commercial Databases

- 3.17.1 Apart from recently enabled users, who were not in a position to comment, the consensus on the usage of commercially supplied databases was wholly supportive. In fact, their availability has not only strengthened the usefulness of the system but has considerably raised the profile of LINETS within the Community. The three databases available, Westlaw, the Stair Memorial Encyclopaedia and Westlaw all have their advocates, and the potential removal of these resources (due at the end of March 2001) is seen as a damaging regression.

3.18 Priority for Retention of Commercial Services

- 3.18.1 The assessment provided no definite view of priorities existing between various products. All are useful to proportions of the user population, and the removal of any one or more is certain to harm the usefulness of LINETS at a number of user Sites.
- 3.18.2 It is probable that financial and contractual issues, rather than the desires of any group of users will decide database retention issues. Ideally, all should be retained for continued use in the system.

3.19 Other Issues Raised

- 3.19.1 Apart from further commentary about the need to continue with LINETS, and its value to users, no other issues were raised during the survey.
- 3.19.2 This in itself provides an unwritten statement on the value of the system. LINETS has not been ignored and has grown in use, with users gaining considerable benefits. The Pilot Site users wish to see the system move forward, be further developed and become a valued asset with the Scottish Justice Community.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

4.1 Conclusions

4.1.1 The conclusions drawn from the findings of the evaluation were as follows:

- a. The LINETS System is widely used to a good level of employment by a significant number of professionals in the Justice Community;
- b. While the System has not necessitated changes to business processes users have gained significant advantages from desktop information access using a single portal;
- c. System usage has covered the spectrum of legal information from legislation to case law and opinions, together with references to instructions and circulars;
- d. Users do not find themselves dependent on the system, but a return to earlier methods of information retrieval would be a retrograde step;
- e. Considerable satisfaction about both the system services and support provided was voluntarily offered;
- f. Effectiveness benefits are considerable, with significant savings in time both for operational and research prompted tasks. The consequence of these will be increases in capacity and work throughput both in professional and administrative roles. Some efficiency and economy savings, mainly printing and publications, were also noted;
- g. A number of desirable database additions were recorded, the most popular being a need for the SCCRs and SCLRs produced by The Law Society of Scotland. Discussions on their acquisition are currently in hand with the Project Management Team;
- h. Desired improvement focussed on the access mechanisms using SecureDial and a need to improve Home Page design. The latter action has been undertaken, while the former is attributed to inexperience;
- i. In general most users found the database material to be of use, although expectedly not all users employed the same information groups. Most popular were the Statute Law Database, PINS, the three commercially supplied databases and some of the Community Domain material;
- j. In commenting on the effects of losing LINETS most felt that survival was not an issue but the loss of benefits and savings would be considerable;
- k. Lawtel, Stair and Westlaw were all seriously used and should form part of the ongoing future system. Decisions in this area should be financially driven and taken by the Project Board, supported where necessary by the User Group membership.

4.2 Recommendation

- 4.2.1 It is unreservedly recommended that LINETS continue as a System Service, operated on behalf of the Justice Community in Scotland. This recommendation is based on the evidence derived from this evaluation, the statistics on system usage taken at regular intervals by the Project, and the views of the Project Management Team.