

This is factsheet 12 of 12 relating to the Local Directgov Programme and aimed at Local Authority staff that are involved in the Programme

## **SUSTAINING THE LINKS WITH LOCAL DIRECTGOV**

This factsheet provides guidance on keeping the data provided to Local Directgov up to date, and also how to access ongoing help and advice. It covers

- Determining the best approach
- Using a portal
- Maintaining the link data
- Submitting data files to Local Directgov
- Responding to alerts from Local Directgov
- Informing Local Directgov of important changes
- Accessing Local Directgov support

### **Determining the best approach**

By the end of March 2006, local authorities will have submitted to Local Directgov their URL data for the full range of local service/interactions that relate to their authority. In the majority of cases, this data will have been collected and submitted via the esd-toolkit either by updating a csv formatted file, or by manually entering the data into the esd-toolkit. In a few cases, an authority may have used an XML file for uploading this data.

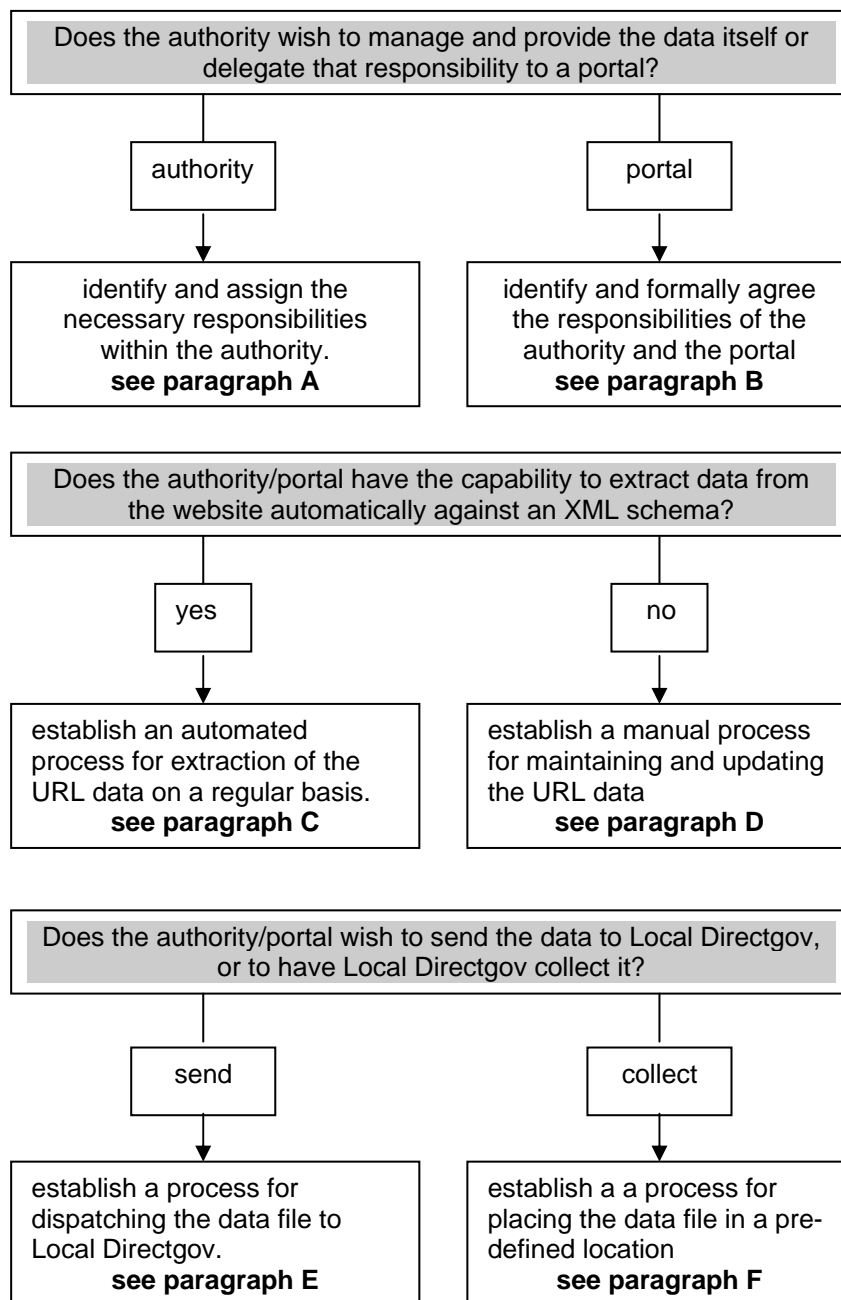
Local Directgov is using this data to redirect Directgov users to the correct pages in the local authority site.

To maintain the integrity of these links, local authorities need to continue to provide Local Directgov with details of any changes to these link addresses. Changes in the authority's site which could impact the Local Directgov links include

- addition or deletion of service/interactions in the site
- modification to the structure of pages relating to an individual service/interaction
- changes to the site navigation structure
- upgrades to the CMS which impact the addresses of pages within the site
- implementation of a new CMS

Local authorities differ in how they deliver their websites. Local Directgov has developed a number of different models for authorities to use to sustain the data. The following four questions should **each** be used to identify the most

appropriate model, the details of which are described in paragraphs A - F following



**A.** If an authority opts to have the full relationship with Local Directgov itself, and to maintain the data, the following responsibilities should be assigned within the authority

- to manage the relationship with Local Directgov
- to ensure that the processes are in place to maintain the URL data and pass update files to Local Directgov

## Local Directgov Programme

- to receive and respond to alerts and reports received from Local Directgov (the nominated "Web Portal Officer")

In many authorities these responsibilities will be assigned to a single post, in some they may be split.

### Using a portal

- B.** To reduce the resources required to maintain this data, some authorities may wish to delegate some or all of these responsibilities to a portal. This could be done where
- the portal has or can generate the necessary data at the service/interaction level required by Local Directgov
  - by adopting a common approach for several authorities, the use of the portal represents a cost effective method of sharing resources
  - the portal is given the necessary authority to manage the data on behalf of the council.

If a portal is to be used, it is advisable that the full responsibilities for providing all the data for that authority be delegated to the portal. Split responsibilities could sometimes lead to confusion. The agreement is entirely between the authority and the portal, but should specify:

- whether the portal should be given access to the authority's data area within the esd-toolkit as its agent
- the scope of URL data to be maintained and supplied to Local Directgov. As Local Directgov operates at the service / interaction level, it is necessary for the portal to be able to provide the URL data at that level. Some portals operate only at the service level, and may require further development to be able to maintain and provide addresses for individual interactions. It may be possible for the portal to maintain the data at service level (ie interaction 8 = Providing Information) via an automated process, and to supplement it manually for the other interactions. However, this will require more complex management processes
- the method to be used to provide the data. Most portals will wish to use a consistent method across all authorities it is acting for. It will be necessary for portals to provide data to Local Directgov in separate files, one per authority. Note that Local Directgov **cannot** receive data on an aggregated basis, portals must be able to format and manage the data for each authority separately
- whether Local Directgov alerts should be routed straight to the portal, or via the authority. This is done by nominating the Web Portal Officer from the responsible organisation
- the processes between the portal and the authority for
  - responding to alerts
  - reporting on the integrity of the links
  - reporting on the traffic routed via Directgov

- whether the authority should retain its capability to deal directly with Local Directgov as a backup process

### **Maintaining the link data through an automated process**

- C.** To reduce the resources required to maintain this data, authorities / portals should, where possible, aim to implement an **automated** process of extracting a file of the required URL address data on a regular basis, and submitting it to Local Directgov.

The pre-requisites for this will usually be:

- a functional CMS or well-structured website database in which the URLs for the required services / interactions can be easily identified
- accurate and well-maintained metadata which can be used to identify the services / interactions
- the ability to generate data files against an XML schema

The implementation of the extract process should be designed in consultation with the CMS supplier or Systems Integrator. Local Directgov and LA early adopters for XML have been working with many of the suppliers working in the local government marketplace, and many will have already determined the most appropriate ways to implement this requirement for their own product.

Details of the approaches taken by different suppliers and LA early adopters will be available from <http://www.ldghowto.org.uk/1.htm>.

There you will be able to find the following documentation:

- case studies
- technical guidance
- lessons learned and examples of best practice

You can find details of how to implement the Local Directgov XML schema on Factsheet no. 5

For further guidance on metadata, please see Factsheet no. 8

### **Maintaining the link data through a manual process**

- D.** Authorities which do not use a CMS may not have as many opportunities to automate the processes of extracting the URL address data. However, it is important that they include within their standard **manual** processes for managing and administering the website, the tasks necessary to provide Local Directgov with the required data. This can be done by maintaining a record in CSV format of the URLs for the required services / interactions and updating it whenever a site change means a URL needs to be altered.

In order for a local authority officer to be able to download a CSV file of their URL data from esd-toolkit they must FIRST be “registered” on the site and then be given permission to do so by their LA esd-toolkit Administrator.

To register they need to go to: [www.esd-toolkit.org](http://www.esd-toolkit.org) and register themselves on the site – this is similar to signing up to a hotmail or other email account. NB it is not necessary for them to click the “subscribe as well” box when registering. They will automatically be sent a password when registered and can then log-in.

Their esd-toolkit administrator can then give them permissions as the “Web Portal Officer”. If they are unsure as to who this is they can email [esd-toolkit@idea.gov.uk](mailto:esd-toolkit@idea.gov.uk) and request this information.

Please see Factsheet No. 4 for details and steps required to download a CSV file from esd-toolkit and record the URL data in it.

### **Submitting the data files to Local Directgov**

To submit the extracted file to Local Directgov, the authority currently has two options

1. it may upload the file into the authority's area on the esd-toolkit. On the following night, it will be extracted from the esd-toolkit and uploaded into the Local Directgov application
2. it may place the file in a pre-agreed location outside the authority's firewall. The esd-toolkit will pick up the file from that location overnight and load the data into the toolkit for uploading to Local Directgov the following night. However, please note that this facility is ONLY AVAILABLE for XML files (not CSV files)

#### **E.** To upload the file into the esd-toolkit

Information on how to upload an authority's **XML** file can be found at <http://www.esd.org.uk/esdtoolkit/FAQ/For0065.pdf> (note this link requires login to esd-toolkit using the authority's password)

For **CSV** files, the “Portal channel address data upload” page can be accessed from esd-toolkit's “Tools” menu, “Uploads” option. Uploaded data must be in CSV (not Excel) format.

Upload will normally only add or update channel information for specified service interactions. It will not add new interactions unless you check the ‘Add interactions not already recorded’ check box. When this box is checked, any service interactions in the CSV file that do not already exist in the authority's esd-toolkit data will be added so long as you have not marked the corresponding service as ‘not

applicable'. If you use the option to add interactions, an e-mail message will be sent to the authority's esd-toolkit main administrator.

If you upload a CSV file with blank channel addresses, any existing addresses will be removed.

More detail on the uploading of CSV files into the esd-toolkit can be found on Factsheet No. 4

**F.** To arrange for the file to be picked up

Those authorities providing the URL data in XML format can opt to place the file in a pre-determined location and have it picked up for loading into the esd-toolkit. The following information should be provided in the authority's area of the esd-toolkit:

- the full URL of the file with XML data that can be accessed via FTP
- FTP username (defaulting to anonymous)
- FTP user password (optional)

esd-toolkit will perform a nightly check to see if the date and time stamp of the file has changed. If so, it will upload the file and import it to esd-toolkit.

Each upload will be followed by an e-mail message to the Web Portal Officer advising that the upload was attempted, if it was successful and any exceptions reported.

To reduce load on esd-toolkit from continual small changes to XML, esd-toolkit will limit automated uploads to a maximum of one per week per Local Authority. Authorities may, of course, make manual uploads (as per paragraph E above) with whatever frequency the authority chooses

Every night, the Local Directgov uploads the new or changed URL data from the esd-toolkit. It tests the viability of all URLs uploaded to the system that day from the esd-toolkit (or from the direct LDG upload facility currently in development). It will not load URL data into the live database if the format is invalid (e.g. spaces) or if the URL is found to be inactive at the time of the test. On the next two runs of the update procedure, any inactive URLs will be checked again and loaded if their status has changed, and they are now active.

Web Portal Managers will be contacted by email whenever the authority has provided new or updated URLs for upload to Local Direct Gov. The email and its attached spreadsheet reports the results of the LDG update process. The text of the alert is shown in Appendix A

## **Responding to Local Directgov Alerts**

The Local Directgov application regularly checks the integrity of the links to local authority sites. Where there are problems or potential problems detected, the application will issue alerts by email to the authority's nominated Web Portal Officer. There are two main types of alert

- broken links
- inactive websites

### **Broken links**

The broken links test is run by Local Directgov between 6.00am and 10.00 pm every day. The process tests all URL data held on the Local Directgov database for each authority. It will process as many Local Authorities as possible within the allotted period and continue the following day.

If a URL is found to be broken (no response), the Local Directgov application will refer all searches for that particular service/interaction to the service information page (interaction no. 8) or, if that is the page that is not available, to the contacts page for the authority. An email alert will be sent to the designated Web Portal officer for the authority. The text of the alert is shown in Appendix B

If the authority web site was down for scheduled maintenance at the time that the test was run, then the email alert should be ignored and no further action needs to be taken.

The email alert for the broken link will have an attached csv file showing all the broken links detected for that site. The columns in the csv file will contain:

- LA ref
- LGSL number
- LGIL number
- Service name
- Broken link URL
- Error number
- Suggested alternative link

Please check and repair your broken links. If a link is now active, you need take no further action. The Local Directgov application checks all known broken links at the beginning of every daily run, and removes the redirection to the default page once the link is restored.

Where the link remains inactive, you need to take steps to restore it :

- If this is a technical problem, then this requires you to deal with this through your normal support procedures

## Local Directgov Programme

- If the page has been deleted or the URL has changed, it will be necessary for you to resubmit the URL to Local Directgov. This can be done either via the esd-toolkit or directly to the LDG interface (available from April 2006). The csv file will provide a suggested alternative URL for this service/interaction. Normal routing may take a couple of days to occur.

Please endeavour to repair your broken links as speedily as possible. When a specific link has remained broken for at least three consecutive days (error code 3001), the Local Directgov Liaison team may contact you directly to assist with the restoration of this link.

### Inactive websites

Active site tests are run by Local Directgov regularly throughout the day between the hours of 6.00 am to 9.00 pm. The test are undertaken to determine whether authority web sites are considered to be active.

Local Directgov site will check the authority's home page and contacts page. If they are not available then LDG will assume that the site is unavailable . If the contacts and home page are available the test will continue to include an additional five URLs.

When the home and contacts page are active and at least 1 additional web page can be identified, then the site will be considered to be active but an email will be sent out to advise of any broken links detected (see above).

If the home and contacts page and/or all 5 selected URLs are unavailable, the web site will be considered to be inactive and Local Directgov will direct all enquiries to a cached contacts page with a suitable message. Additionally the designated Web Portal Manager at the authority will receive an email alert from Local Directgov to inform them that the site is deemed unavailable. The text of the alert is shown in Appendix C. No csv file will be attached to the email.

Broken link testing will be suspended for the authority while the site is considered to be unavailable.

If the site continues to be unavailable, a second email alert will be sent out that day but no further emails will be sent until the following day or until the site is found to be active again.

On receipt of an email alert reporting that the web site is unavailable , the authority should check the availability of the site and take any necessary actions to restore the site's availability.

If the website is available and we continue to send this email alert, the authority may need to look at its firewall rules, as these may be preventing external users via Directgov reaching the site.

Once the site is active, Local Direct Gov will send an email confirming that the site is now active and normal redirection of enquiries to that site has been re-established.

The Local Directgov Liaison team will be closely monitoring the availability of sites and will contact the Web Portal Officer directly if the site is unavailable for more than 48 hours to offer assistance and guidance. In addition the Local Directgov system will be reporting on down times for authority web sites on an ongoing basis.

### **Informing Local Directgov of important changes**

Local authorities are requested to keep in touch with Local Directgov and to inform the LDG liaison team when there are changes occurring within the local authority which may impact on the Local Directgov service. This is not expected to be an onerous task, but proactive liaison will ensure that the service provided to Directgov users trying to reach the authority's site is maintained at the highest quality at all times.

Local authorities should ensure that Local Directgov is notified of

- changes in key personnel in the authority, particularly the nominated Web Portal Officer and the Web Services manager
- changes to the authority's website home page or contacts page address
- changes to the way in which the authority will maintain and submit its URL data to Local Directgov
- changes to the Content Management System used by the authority
- changes in the authorities use of the esd-toolkit for link address purposes

It is always better if the authority can notified Local Directgov of changes at the planning stage before they are implemented. The liaison team may be able to provide useful advice and assistance if required.

The Local Directgov Liaison team can be contacted at [localdirectgov@odpm.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:localdirectgov@odpm.gsi.gov.uk)

To find out how to update your authority's Web Portal Officer, home page URL or Contacts page URL, please refer to Factsheet No. 4

If the authority is planning to procure a new CMS system for its website, Local Directgov will be able to advise on

- how to specify the requirement to provide XML feeds and interface with Local Directgov
- the approaches of different CMS suppliers to the Local Directgov requirement

## Local Directgov Programme

For further information on how to specify the technical requirements for Local Directgov, we advise that you use the minimal approach to using the Local Directgov XML schema. This will outline the basic requirements for use of the schema, allowing your supplier to easily include the Local Directgov requirements in their technical specification. This can be found at Factsheet No. 5.

### Accessing Local Directgov support

Local Directgov will provide the following types of support service to local authorities

1. Local Directgov Liaison team
  - support for maintaining the link data
  - advice and news on developments in standards and controlled lists (eg LGSL, LGIL, IPSV)
  - news on Directgov developments
  - channel for local authority comments and suggestions for Directgov and Local Directgov
  - advice on working with portals
  - advice on the implementation of reciprocal deep-links to Directgov from authority sites
  - materials and advice for local marketing of Directgov

The Local Directgov Liaison team can be contacted at [localdirectgov@odpm.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:localdirectgov@odpm.gsi.gov.uk)

2. Local Directgov website ([www.local.gov.uk/localdirectgov](http://www.local.gov.uk/localdirectgov))
  - background information
  - news items
  - articles
  - press releases
  - downloadable documents
  - frequently asked questions
  - newsletters
3. Local Directgov Factsheets ([/www.ldghowto.org.uk/1.htm](http://www.ldghowto.org.uk/1.htm))
  1. what data is needed for phase 2?
  2. data collection methods
  3. manual data collection
  4. CSV delimited file data collection
  5. XML data collection
  6. what support will you get?
  7. key dates

8. metadata
  9. top five benefits
  10. technical overview of the programme
  11. guidance of selecting and entering URLs into the toolkit
  12. sustaining the links with Local Directgov (this factsheet)
4. Local Directgov Good Practice Guidance
- CD-Roms
  - telephone support line
  - online forum

The Good Practice Guidance issued to date cover:

Part 1:

- General good practice guidelines for online forms
- Specific guidelines for 12 LA transactions including paying of council tax online, renewing a library book, making a planning application, applying for a job, booking the removal of bulky rubbish by a local authority and locating the nearest recycling facilities

Part 2:

- e-Accessibility - providing web access for all, regardless of ability or access technology
- Events - providing online event submission, viewing and booking
- Email Alerts/SMS/RSS - communicating with users through different methods and technologies
- Error Messaging - providing clear, useful and consistent error messaging across a website
- Online School Admissions - implementing good practice online processes for schools admissions
- Metrics - assessing how a website is being used, including traffic levels and popular areas
- Security - helping to make a website secure
- Take-up - driving the adoption of e-channels for information and services
- Usability Testing - understanding the value of testing with real users during a site's development

These services can be accessed by registering with the Local Directgov Usability Helpdesk at [www.localdirectgovhelp.info](http://www.localdirectgovhelp.info)

## Appendix A : email - URL update report

The following text will be sent in the email reporting on the receipt of new or updated URLs from an authority

**Report : Local Directgov update test** (esd-toolkit data load test)

Proposed wording for email

Subject: Local Directgov Alert – Local Directgov update test

This email was automatically sent to you as the nominated web portal officer for council name

Every night changes to the URLs supplied by your Council through the esd-toolkit are checked against your website for validation. If the URL(s) are invalid then the LDG database is not updated with that service/interaction entry.

This email is sent to you whenever changes are supplied by your council.

The Local Directgov update test was run at date/time with the following results:

- x URLs received from esd-toolkit were tested
- x URLs were good
- x URLs had errors

The details of all the results are included in the CSV file attached to this email.

### **Actions required:**

Please check the attached report and update the toolkit as necessary; many of the errors are down to typing errors when entering information into the toolkit. We provide a suggested alternative URL for each failed link.

If you have any queries on this email, or would like assistance in resolving the issues please contact your Local Directgov Engagement Support Officer. (This sentence will have to change in April 2006)

## Appendix B : email alert - Broken link test

The following text will be sent in the email alert for a broken link

Subject: Local Directgov Alert – Broken link test

This email was automatically sent to you as the nominated web portal officer for council name

The broken links test checks whether that the URLs held on the local Directgov database for your council are active. This process is run several times a week for your council within the hours between 6.00 am and 10.00pm.

This email alert is sent if Local Directgov has detected failed links to URL you have supplied.

When Local Directgov detects a broken link it will redirect the all searches for that service/interaction to the service information page or, if that page is not available, to the contacts page.

The broken link test was run at date/time with the following results:

x URL held on the LDG database were tested  
x URL had errors

Details of the errors are included in the CSV file attached to this email.

### **Actions required:**

Please check the URL with reported errors.

If the error code is 3004, then the broken links test has detected a failed URL. If you do not take action, an error code 3001 will be generated indicating that the URL for the specified service/ interaction has been unavailable on 3 consecutive runs of the broken links test .

Please check the reported URL on your website, they may be active again. You may need to amend your toolkit entries if a new URL has been created for that service/interaction. We provide a suggested alternative URL for each failed link.

If you have any queries on this email, or would like assistance in resolving the issues please contact your Local Directgov Engagement Support Officer. (This *sentence will have to change in April 2006*)

Local Directgov

## Appendix C : email alert - Inactive site test

The following text will be sent in the email alert for an inactive site

### Report : Active Site test

Subject: Local Directgov Alert – Active site test

This email was automatically sent to you as the nominated web portal officer for council name

The active site test is run against your council's main web site regularly between 6.00am and 9.00pm. The test checks availability of your home page and main contacts page plus an additional 5 stored URLs.

This email is only sent when terminal errors occur that indicate that your website is no longer active \*. It will be sent on the first three occurrences of finding your web site unavailable within one day. If the test proves negative on subsequent days, three emails only will be sent each day even though Local Directgov will continue to regularly check availability. When Local Direct Gov detects your site is once again available a confirmation email will be sent to you.

The active site test was run at date/time with the following recorded results:

Home page URL: result

Contact page URL: result

URL check: result

\* a negative result will occur if we cannot reach your home and contacts page and/or 5 additional URLs .

### Actions required:

Please check availability of your web site. If the website is available and we continue to send this email alert, you may need to look at your firewall rules.

We will continue to monitor your web site and until your site is active again Local Directgov system will direct all searches to a cached contacts page with a suitable message.

The active site test will continue to monitor your site and as soon as the home page URL is active, Local Directgov will start to redirect users to the appropriate URLs on your website and send you an email to inform you that we have reinstated normal service to your web site.

If you have any queries on this email, or would like assistance in resolving the issues please contact your Local Directgov Engagement Support Officer. (This *sentence will have to change in April 2006*)

Local Directgov