Death of the Desktop:
An English Local Government Perspective

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INTRODUCTION

It's not so much 'death of the desktop', more 'death of the desk'. For many the next few years will see the end of local government in England as we know it. But it won't be the end of local government. It will though deliver its services in a radically different way.

For visualisation the issues are reassuringly familiar, but still unanswered by the discipline: how do you make sense of 'Big Data' to make better decisions across a diverse audience.

1   SETTING THE SCENE

Four of the most pressing scenarios that visualization needs to provide answers for.

1.1   Death of the desk

The death of the desktop is happening in a literal sense with less office space for Local Government (LG) workers. Many authorities having moved into offices that are smaller, have fewer desks, and with staff hot-desking or encouraged to work from home.

There will be fewer LG workers too, with massive cuts in funding of around 30 per cent, leading to high numbers of redundancies, and so more work will be done by less people.

However, desktops will definitely still be used in LGs in ten years' time. Many in local government are still using Windows XP, and so change can be slow and incremental, and the use of mobile technologies less prevalent than you might think.

The point: A workforce that needs effective tools to communicate and collaborate will be needed.

1.2   Death of the survey

The second issue to consider is that the nature of understanding citizens in LG is changing. Traditional paper based surveys – and yes, they still exist – and citizens' panels are becoming less common, and less valued than before. Tick-box consultations are being replaced by something a bit more sophisticated.

For example work by the Government's Behaviour Insights Team, or the 'Nudge Unit', applies insights from behavioural economics and psychology to encourage and support people to make better choices for themselves.

The point: That capturing and visualising data about people's actual behaviour is more useful than asking them about it.

### 1.3   Death of organizational structures

We first need to change the way we provide services, rather than adding technology to the way we currently work. With less money, and an ageing population, LGs will have to radically change the way it provides, delivers or commissions services, and be less constrained by traditional public sector siloed organisational and service structures.

But you can't just procure innovative services. Before procurement LGs will therefore need to:

1. Develop a holistic understanding of the **nature of need** of people, not just an understanding of the services people use.

2. Recognize the **aspirations** of people.

3. Be aware of the **local assets** that already exist that might meet those needs and aspirations.

4. Finally, have a sharper understanding of the **intended outcomes** for services, and establish the financial and **social value** of those outcomes.

The diagram on the next page outlines a new way of gathering insight for commissioning (http://www.lsr-online.org/leicestershire-reports-guidance.html).

It starts with the problem, not the solution. It measures outcomes not just outputs.
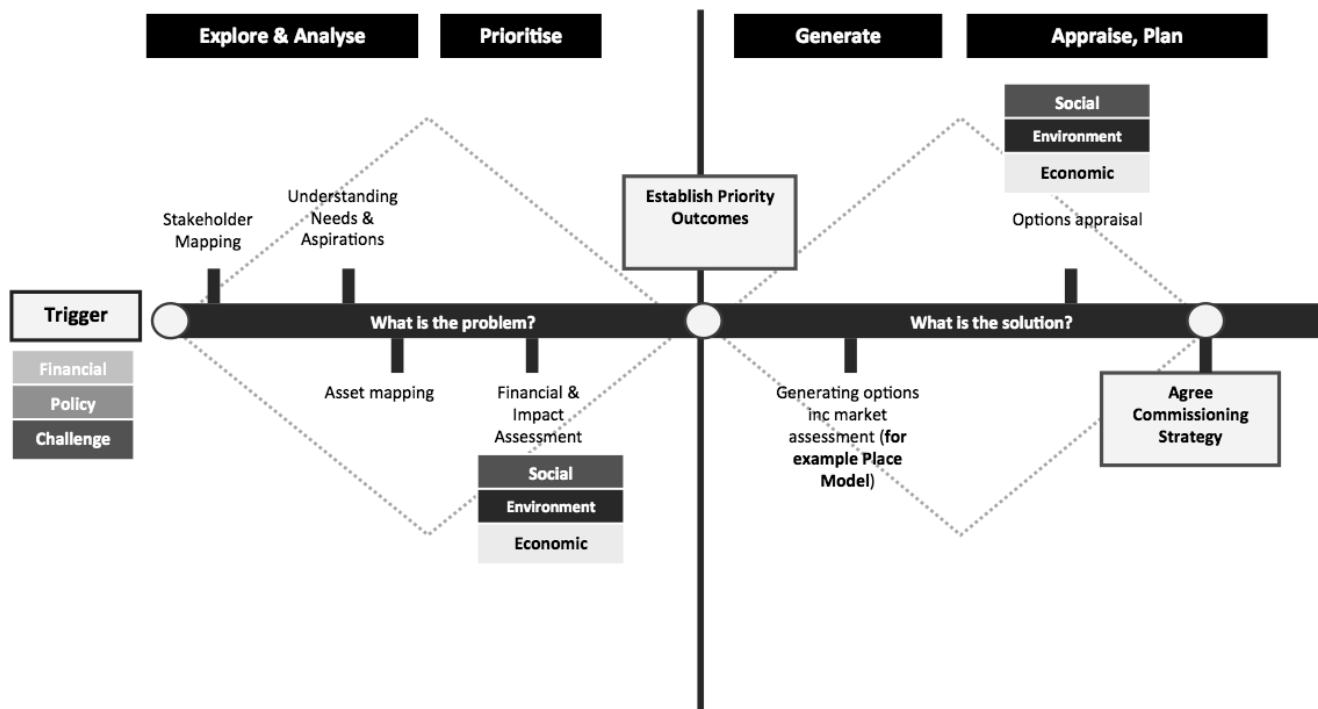
1.4 Death of the bureaucrat

There will be a greater role for 'the democratization of decision making'. This has always been sought by LGs – e.g. in public meetings, consultation activities and data stores – but these largely fall down because the lack of the relevant data, and the ability to make sense of the data.

The challenge is that decision-making will become devolved further to the local level so communities are actually running services - e.g. more and more communities in England are running local libraries.

The point: Can visualisation provide the insight needed for citizen decision makers and citizen auditors?

2 CONCLUSION: ESCAPING DESK LAND

Local Authorities are facing an extraordinary financial challenge and, whether they know it or not, all residents are receiving a service from a LG and will therefore be affected by that challenge.

Service delivery will have to change. People will be expected to do more for themselves. Communities will be expected to deliver services.

Yet most LG services are provided remotely, interacting with people in their homes or where they work or play, and the future of visualisation in off-desktop in LG should be about this 'real world' data to support the decision making to drive change to the entire system.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS