

**IA08 17 & 18 JUNE 2008 PARK PLAZA RIVERBANK, LONDON**

**INFORMATION ASSURANCE PLACED AS 'TOP AGENDA ITEM' FOR PUBLIC SECTOR**

Government organisations must have Information Assurance (IA) at their core if they are to regain the public's confidence in the way secure data is handled.

The issue emerged as the key theme at IA08, the Government's Information Assurance showpiece annual conference, where more than 500 senior Government figures and industry leaders gathered to discuss latest trends and share best practice in IA.

With the issue firmly in the spotlight due to a number of recent data losses by public bodies, delegates heard from keynote speakers, including Cabinet Secretary and Head of the Civil Service Sir Gus O'Donnell, Security Adviser to the Prime Minister Robert Hannigan and HMG Government's Chief Information Officer John Suffolk on how public confidence needed to be restored in the way sensitive information was handled.

The two-day conference was chaired by Director of GCHQ Sir David Pepper.

"The spotlight is now firmly on Information Assurance issues and on us, the IA community, to act," he said. "Never before has Information Assurance been subject to this level of widespread external scrutiny.

"See this as an opportunity," he told delegates. "An opportunity to maintain our momentum as we move forward. An opportunity to garner support from our wider organisations – and the public – as we implement change."

Delivering the second day's keynote speech Sir Gus called on the industry to help drive the change that is needed as the Government strives to build world-class public services.

Much of this is based on the use of technology, including using Government data to improve services, he said.

"We need to join things up and do it securely," he said. "That moves us to a much better service."

The importance of IA as an issue for Whitehall was reflected in Sir Gus chairing a meeting of Permanent Secretaries of all Government Departments at a side meeting at the event.

Sir David, in his keynote speech on the first day, said recent reviews, including the Government's Data Handling Review (DHR) and other reports, had provided the industry with a platform for further development.

"We have moved from a world where Information Assurance was viewed as a purely technical issue to a world where Information Assurance is recognised to be a much broader issue, encompassing all aspects of the collection, use, storage and disposal of information – in whatever form," he said.

Speaking about the DHR Mr Hannigan said there was a need for Government to ensure the right people had access to the right information while protecting personal information.

"This is vitally important as a recent survey by the Institute for Insight into Public Services reported that only 37 per cent of those polled had confidence in the Government to handle their personal data securely," he said.

“This is a baseline which we must work to improve.”

There was now a need for cultural change, he added, pointing out that only five per cent of Government data breaches are because of technology failure with the rest due to human error or process failure.

During his speech Mr Suffolk looked at the ‘human challenge’ of getting public sector employees to adopt good IT practice and used a series of motoring commercials such as drink-driving, 30mph speed limits and the Green Cross Code as examples of behaviour change campaigns. In identifying the connection between these commercials and good IA practice he explained: “We know it, but we don’t always do it.”

He then looked at five, interlinked strands of focus that are at the heart of adopting good IA practice, ranging from awareness, understanding and education to the development of the IA community, applying standards and rules to monitoring compliance and learning.

He emphasised the approach was to create clarity in what is acceptable in terms of IA, providing clear, simple governance and encouraging broad involvement and action.

Mr Suffolk believes that there is now serious recognition in Government for the need for change and that the challenge has been set to drive ‘to the best IA holistic capability’.

He concluded saying that: “our emerging action plan, requirements and governance position must now place IA as a top agenda item for all public sector bodies.”

The challenge for the IA industry was underlined by a survey of IA08 delegates conducted by content security providers Clearswift which revealed a wide gap between the current situation and what is needed for IA to succeed.

Stephen Millard, vice-president marketing at Clearswift, said: “We are hardwired to believe that security is a technical issue rather than a business issue. Only by taking action at board level can IA increase. It’s about process and culture. IA must be hardwired into an organisation’s make up.”

Summing up the event in his concluding remarks, Sir David said it showed while much had been achieved in since last year’s conference, there was still much to do.

The data breaches of the past six months had dramatically altered the landscape but had given IA a new momentum and it was now even more important that those at the very top of their organisations, whether Government departments or private companies, brought about the changes needed.

“I’m absolutely clear that change won’t happen unless it is led from the very top,” he said.

He identified the need for a change in culture in organisations to ensure IA was put at their very heart – but there needed to be a balance between security and usability.

IA08 also included discussion panels led by leading industry figures, case studies, research findings and workshops.

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