
Editorial News

'Infoshop' Pilot

A new pilot project has been set up by the government's Invest to Save Budget (ISB). The pilot, called 'Infoshop', has been set up to offer advice to the public and business community on a range of regulatory issues. It will be led by a consortium of local authorities, central government departments and other public bodies.

The pilot will concentrate on business and citizens' requirements for help on regulatory issues. The issues to be covered are planning, building control, health and safety, and food safety. If successful, the model may be expanded to offer advice on a much broader range of services.

This pilot will build on an electronic system developed by the London Borough of Bexley. The Bexley system will be remodelled and expanded to enable front line staff to answer complex queries about a range of regulation issues such as whether planning permission is needed or how best to ensure workers' safety.

The technology will be used to support many new and innovative ways of offering information and advice to business and the citizen, including through one stop shops and call centres. The pilot will involve local authorities from across the country from Barnsley to Waltham Forest and it will offer:

- advice that is comprehensive and consistent on the first point of contact;
- advice from one person on a range of issues, rather than being passed from pillar to post;
- on-the-spot help, such as pre-completion of forms using technology similar to that used in telephone banking.

The consortium is being coordinated by the Cabinet Office. It involves local authorities, the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the Department of Health, the Health and Safety Executive and the University of Salford.

Y2K Threat from Central and Eastern Europe

British businesses trading with Central and Eastern European companies are threatened by the regions' failure to take appropriate action over the year 2000 (Y2K) computer bug according to a new survey by London law firm Cameron McKenna.

The survey was carried out between December 1998 and January 1999 and over 1000 companies based in Warsaw, Prague, Budapest, Moscow, Almaty and Tashkent were surveyed.

The survey found that the lack of government leadership, the failure to share best practice, and ignorance of the threat Y2K poses to complex supply chains, were likely to create significant business and infrastructure disruption throughout Central and Eastern Europe.

John Armstrong, head of the firm's IT and Telecoms practice and a member of the Y2K Taskforce at Cameron McKenna said:

"Any UK company operating or investing in

Central and Eastern Europe should check the readiness of their suppliers, customers, business partners and offices throughout the region. The complexity of supply chains and the interdependence of IT systems means that even if a company in the UK has taken every precaution and proves to be entirely compliant in the UK, its operations and business associations in Central and Eastern Europe could disrupt their business leading to loss of profit or worse."

UK Social Reporting Award

The Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) and the Institute for Social and Ethical Accountability (Accountability) have announced the launch of the first Social Reporting Award for UK based enterprises.

The award scheme is designed to encourage best practice in reporting the social accountability issues that face all organisations. The awards build upon a significant groundswell of social reporting that has taken place over the past eighteen months and the aim is to encourage large scale organisations to address social as well as environmental and financial reporting issues.

The UK awards are intended to emulate the success of the UK Environmental Reporting Award Scheme run by ACCA since 1991. The ACCA ERA scheme has proved influential in the development of corporate environmental reporting in the UK and has been mirrored in many other countries. The new scheme will be run separately from, but in parallel with, the ACCA's environmental awards. The first cycle will be in mid-1999, with the first presentations being made in early 2000.

Conferences and Seminars

London Guildhall University Summer School

The University is offering intensive study programmes in English and International Law from 12 July to 6 August 1999 as part of its well-established Summer School.

The courses concentrate on legal issues arising within a business or commercial context and are of particular value to lawyers or law students from overseas. Courses to be offered this summer include:

- Fundamentals of English Business Law;
- International Law;
- Intellectual Property Law;
- Foundations of European Union Law.

Further information about the courses is available from:

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