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Meeting between Local Authorities discussing the creation of a WARP

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Contents

1	Scope	2
2	Background	2
3	Specific learning points.....	2
3.1	The LA environment and security issues.....	2
3.2	WARP benefits and barriers	3
3.3	Points for a WARP launch event	4
4	Conclusions	5
	History	5

1 Scope

This case study describes the learning points from a meeting between six Local Authorities discussing the creation of a WARP - circa 2003. It also includes a discussion on the structure and agenda of an event to launch the WARP among a larger Local Authority audience.

It can be used by other emerging WARPs as a reference document during the early stages in creating a WARP, to help in planning similar meetings with their own community to understand the issues and support for a WARP.

This is for reference only and should not be taken as an indication of the outcome or the validity of the assertions made during the meeting discussion.

2 Background

The meeting was organised by an individual in a Local Authority (LA) who believed information security is important, with the objective to present the WARP concept to a number of LAs and solicit their views on the best way to take the WARP idea forward.

The meeting was supported by representatives, and presentations, from NISCC, OeE, SOCITM, and the prospective WARP operator with attendees from six LAs with responsibility at the technical/policy level associated with IT systems and information security.

3 Specific learning points

3.1 The LA environment and security issues

The following points were noted:

1. It was suggested that the best language to use when engaging the wider community was in the context of managing Risk. In other words, the benefits identified should be linked back to the risks which were being addressed. Risk assessment and risk management are familiar terms within Boroughs.
2. All attendees have embarked on some sort of programme to adopt the good practices for Information Security detailed in BS7799.
 - a. Many are at different stages of BS7799
 - b. It was suggested that Risk in the context of BS7799 is not widely understood by senior managers in Boroughs
 - c. Luton is one Borough who has been accredited to BS7799.
3. In discussion it became evident that the demographic makeup of LAs can vary considerably and it was argued that this would affect the take-up of eGov services, and thereby affect the type of incidents experienced between the different LAs.
 - a. However, it was agreed that as eGov services started to replace more conventional means of delivering services, then criminals and fraudsters would be forced into exploiting eGov type services. The WARP would

- therefore provide a community prepared to share experiences on this type of crime as eGov services were rolled out.
- b. It was also suggested that this would be especially important as some of the eGov solutions would be very complex as they would be built on legacy systems which by their very nature would be difficult to protect.
 - c. Although the complexity of these emerging systems could be LA specific, it is argued that there could be common solutions where sharing would produce agreed best practice.
4. It was suggested that many LA senior managers were not aware of the issues and vulnerabilities associated with ICT systems, and the audience agreed with the industry view that not even the most technically proficient understood all the issues and vulnerabilities either.
 5. It was noted that the Chief Information Officer (CIO) role was not common in LAs. This role is being adopted in many commercial organisations as it makes it clear in an organisation exactly who is responsible for its information assets.
 6. It was suggested that perhaps a better approach to engage the CEOs was to link the WARP with business continuity planning and resilience, as many LA CEOs were briefed on this shortly after Sep 11.
 7. Many Boroughs outsource some of their IT services, but it was thought all maintained overall control and responsibility.
 8. In terms of potential impact of an IT related incident, the meeting agreed that reputation was just as important to LAs as it is to commercial companies, thereby supporting the need to provide a trusted environment in the WARP.
 - a. It was also agreed that an LA's legal department may need to be involved in agreeing any sharing criteria and membership agreement.
 - b. It was suggested that although LAs do not compete commercially, there is competition for central government funding such as provided by Pathfinder projects.
 - c. It was also agreed that 'named people' would facilitate building trust when sharing information.

3.2 WARP benefits and barriers

The following points were noted:

9. It was agreed that there are common platforms among LAs, such as those provided by Microsoft, Cisco etc, and it was also suggested that there could be niche software/system suppliers which provided specific software for LAs, although these were not identified specifically.
 - a. These common platforms provide an opportunity for the vendor community to engage with LAs in a more effective way.
 - b. LAs would also have a larger voice, which would help resolve problems and possibly yield procurement benefits.
10. LAs already have agreements with commercial companies for Virus protection/scanning and it was agreed that the WARP should not try and duplicate these services. 'Message labs' was a common product in use.
 - a. It was also noted that it is important that the WARP should not delay any advisories from commercial vendors.
 - b. However, it was noted that UNIRAS has access to virus alerts prior to many being promulgated by the vendors, and could therefore, via the WARP, provide advance information which is impartial and not vendor specific.

11. LAs currently use vendors sites and independent sites such as Bugtraq for advice on the latest incidents and vulnerabilities, but all agreed that patch management is an ongoing issue which requires a lot of time and resource and causes disruption to services.
 - a. Therefore anything which would help reduce the effort in this area and advise on patch priorities would be a benefit.
 - b. The WARP could provide a common view on the priorities which IT managers could use to justify these resources and downtime.
12. In discussing the 'Risk' approach mentioned in point 1, it was agreed that the WARP would assist better understanding of the threat part of the risk equation, as well as the vulnerabilities and priorities. It was noted that this threat information would be validated and also available from sources outside the WARP, via NISCC for example.
13. Education and awareness benefits were also discussed and several examples of best practice were identified in the audience.
 - a. One LA had recently introduced a secure design for home working, which had adopted many examples of Information Security best practice, with many lessons learned which could benefit other LAs.
 - b. Another LA had implemented an IDS system which would be of particular interest to those LAs planning to use this technology in the future because as it was pointed out the advice would not be vendor-biased.

3.3 Points for a WARP launch event

The following points were noted:

14. It was agreed that the event should be targeted at all LAs in the community chosen at the technical/policy level. Once this community was convinced of the merits and an approach agreed, then a strategy for getting support at CEO level should be produced which would probably include running another event later in the year targeted at this higher level.
15. The event should be a whole day with an agenda wider than the WARP to attract attendance from all LAs in the community.
16. The attendees were asked if they would submit examples of information they would be willing to share for the WARP launch event. Several attendees said they would be willing to do this, noting that their submissions would be anonymised.
17. The main aim of the event is to solicit support from all LAs in taking the WARP forward.
18. Suggestions for the agenda include:
 - a. WARP presentation, including anonymised examples of information from Boroughs to make the point that there are real benefits in sharing – see point 16.
 - b. Presentations from LAs on best practice Information security initiatives – e.g. home-working and IDS.
 - c. Microsoft to present on patches and then field a Q&A session
 - d. OeE presentation on BS7799 and their Security Framework
 - e. eAware presentation – an EC funded initiative aimed at Local Government and providing guidance on how to raise Information Security awareness among a non-specialist audience.

- f. Summary and Q&A with the objective of gaining attendees support in taking the WARP forward.

4 Conclusions

The meeting was well attended with many comments and a lively debate on how the WARP could be taken forward. The positive response and support indicated that all parties at the meeting supported this initiative, with one representative saying " I have information which I think would be of interest, but I do not know who to share it with".

The meeting fully supported the prospective WARP operator being the champion for the LA WARP.

History

Version	Date	Description
V1.0	May 2004	First issue for the WARP Toolbox