Speaking notes Mrs Bijleveld
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Session: Fair expectations.

The theme of this session is: "Fair expectations: What can and cannot be expected from ICT? "

This theme suggests that – in fact - we have high expectations but should be realistic about some limitations of ICT.

But being in government I have to deal first with the expectations of the public of the government in general. And then we see a disappointing reality.

The public expects nóthing of the government.

Or rather: is oxymoronic in its expectations.

Let me explain the oxymoron.

An oxymoron is a figure of speech where two opposing issues are bound together. The most common example is: the jumbo shrimp: tall ánd small.

And think about: A modern classic; Peacekeeping military missions. Well, you get the picture...

Now consider what most people expéct from government.

I quote:

"Théy cannot do anything right";

"Théy should close it all down, it is a waste",

"Théy are just there to do their own thing"

"Théy just care about their own jobs, not about us"

I guess you could add to this list a lot clichés and you may even agree with them.

People have traditionally a low expectation of government. They don't perceive government as an entity they will benefit from.

On the other hand – and here comes the oxymoron – they see the government as the entity that is responsible for - and should take care of - éverything.

"Why don't they stop people from being unfriendly to cats?"

"They should clean the beaches"

"They should bring in more taxis "

"The government should check better if people are entitled to welfare"

"Why don't they make the planes leave on time?"

"They should do something about fat people, young people, ugly people, other people ….. Etc"

The list is endless and I hope my point is clear.

We who are in government as politicians or as civil servants must realize that the government simply cannot do right.

To realize this is important because we must not entertain the illusion that if we provide better services, the public will all of a sudden love us. Not even – mind you – if we use the most modern ICT methods.
The public in general distrusts the government and it is its democratic right to do so.

Why then do we go on to provide better services?

Because we believe the public is entitled to the best possible!
And in most cases we have made a commitment to improve services and when we fail to do so we have to disclose our failure and explain. The rule of democratic openness demands this.
To be open and honest.
I know it is not always easy to be open, but it proved to be the best.

Especially when we look at crisis communication – when disasters happen – it is an absolute necessity to be honest, not to muffle or doctor the facts.
They will find out anyway.

I am getting to the ICT side of all this.

Government information is part of the sometimes enormous flow of information that competes for people's attention.

But there is one distinction between the governments – and other information.

Government is "official". That means that is has to be true.

And that means that sometimes reliability has to come before speed. ICT is speed.

In other words: not the possibilities of ICT determine the character of communication, but what has to be divulged to whom.

But, that said and done, it is clear that ICT can and will provide us with ever better ways to create channels for the exchange of information.

It can even create a whole new environment.

The new media for instance provided us with a new politician: the twittering minister and alderman. And they reach - and are reached by - participants in the political arena who want to be informed and involved.

So far about information.

Now about service.

We asked people what they wanted and then we formulated a service code.

Let me give you some items from this code.

Surprisingly the people insisted to be able to select the way they want to approach government.

Théy want to decide whether to use e-mail, snail mail, telephone or just old fashioned in person over a counter.

People also want information that is in normal language and can be found in a logical place.

They want simple forms and want to know when they get an answer.

And they demand that information shared with the government remains confidential and that digital codes are reliable.

In other words: their wishes are not about ICT, but ICT can make an enormous difference to make thing easier and faster.

Pre-completed tax forms are a major timesaver.

When government agencies share basic information, people are spared the annoyance of having to answer the same questions over and over again.

What is the best way to ensure the introduction of the newest and the best in what we call e-government?

The answer is: to let lócal authorities find out and test what works and let thém recommend what should be used by others.

Cities and communities know what people want and what works for local government.

And believe me, they want to be inventive.

Besides, the best way to introduce new procedures is not with an order from above. Much better is when people in one city ask: why can't we have what works elsewhere?

Lastly the matter of the influence people should have on the decision making; participation.

Government should search for what people need and want and should try to involve the community in the way thing are decided and done. ICT can play an innovative role, create new ways.

New media offer intriguing possibilities to reach people in unorthodox ways. What can Twitter and Hyves do for us?

We don't know yet but should be open for it.

We should understand the limitations too.

And some caution is called for. To communicate something to maybe thousands of people is not noncommittal. If we ask citizens for input, something should be done with it.

And the communicator can be held accountable.
Therefore we have to see how we have to deal with
that. But it is intriguing.

So – in conclusion - what are my recommendations?

For the oxymoronic citizen?
We should just hang in there. Do our best with
persistence and tenacity. We should have high
expectation of ourselves. Stubbornness you might
even call it.

To provide the best service?
Listen to what people want and need. Try to find what
works. And use the rich possibilities of ICT to improve
effectiveness and efficiency.

And what about the new media?
The government is an institution. The government
itself cannot be "a friend".
But maybe that is our challenge: to become a friend,
one even in terms of twitter and Hyves.
Wouldn't that be fascinating?