

Cabinet Office

Transformational Government

Enabled by Technology

**Northgate Information Solutions'
response**

February 2006

Transformational Government

Introduction

1. Northgate warmly welcomes the publication of the government's IT strategy. It marks a step-change in approach which we feel will lead to improved planning across public services and the more effective management of IT-enabled change.
2. We are committed to the intelligent use of technology, and to ensuring that it can make a real difference to people's lives - be they managers, on the front line or individual citizens.
3. Our responses focuses on the three key objectives which the strategy identifies as essential to delivering its vision of making government transformational through the use of technology: citizen-centred services; shared services; and greater professionalism in managing the process of change.

Citizen-centred services

4. All citizens have the right to enjoy accessible and responsive public services, able to deliver sustained improvement to the quality of life. It is fundamental to community well-being.
5. Community well-being is founded on trust between local citizens and public authorities. Where there is perceived inactivity on the part of public authorities in dealing with citizens' day to day concerns, people are less likely to trust their ability to deliver fair and efficient public services.
6. At both a national and local level, the structure of public services has traditionally placed organisational functionality above personal need. The real challenge is to meet citizens' demands for services that are more proactive, responsive to individual need and which keep pace with changing expectations.

The learning experience for children and teachers has been transformed through the Classroom 2000 (C2K) project.

C2K provides ICT to all schools across Northern Ireland on behalf of the five education and library boards. The project has provided hardware, software, and enhanced digital teaching resources, making Northern Ireland a leader in transformational education.

7. Northgate welcomes the strategy's commitment to designing services around the needs of people, and particularly the recognition that a better customer experience can be delivered alongside efficiency through cutting down on duplication and routine processing. We also welcome the focus on engaging the public in the development of better services and the importance sharing information on customer satisfaction more widely across government.

Focusing on customer groups

8. There is no one-size fits all approach to public service delivery. People may choose to access services in different ways, but it is crucial that all services are easily and equally accessible.
9. We understand that the needs of particular groups will differ, and are best viewed as a whole. As the consultation notes, this is particularly important when responsibility for delivering the required services cuts across organisational boundaries.
10. However, our concern is that the responsibilities of customer group directors may in fact hinder the strategy's goal if they lead to the formation of new 'silos'. We would like to see clear processes in place to ensure that customer group directors remain able to coordinate service improvement across government, and hope that this matter is addressed as soon as possible in the initial phases. The proposed role of the Service Transformation Director in managing this process is welcome.

New channels of access

11. The consultation proposes giving citizens online access to their records and data held by government, which we wholeheartedly endorse. Wiltshire Safety Camera Partnership has pioneered a new system that offers the public secure online access, free of charge, to speeding fine evidence. Staff have noted higher levels of public satisfaction, a reduction in the number of calls and increased time to spend with customers who still choose to contact the partnership by telephone.

Wiltshire Safety Camera Partnership has pioneered a new system of online access to speeding fine evidence.

The Partnership can now demonstrate transparency in the operation of its scheme, has delivered an improved service to the public and freed up staff time to help people who still prefer to contact the Partnership through conventional routes.

12. The increased use of mobile working and transactional services have the potential to revolutionise delivery as well as freeing up resources so that they can then be redeployed to the front line.
13. Government Connect and the National Projects have opened up a host of opportunities in transactional services, and we hope that the success of these initiatives will be fully realised in the near future.

Multi-agency working

14. Multi-agency working is critical to the improvement of public services. Informal joint working is no longer sufficient to meet citizens' demands for seamless services. Formal information-sharing and exchange networks between a range of organisations can support the development of proactive and holistic services tailored to individual need.
15. Multi-agency working requires new forms of leadership based on new and old forms of co-operation and collaboration across the public and not-for-profit sectors. It not only requires changes in systems, but also changes in culture.
16. Voluntary and community-based organisations often reach out to those citizens that public authorities are unable to. The role of this sector in public service delivery has often been overlooked.

Shared services

17. The use of shared services, whether customer service centres or back-office HR and payroll systems, has the potential to deliver significant savings. Managed correctly, this process could also be used to develop and cement strong partnerships between and across a range of organisations.
18. The development of common technologies to enable joined up solutions will deliver even greater efficiencies, and we welcome the establishment of a Common Infrastructure Board to develop a roadmap and timetable.

19. Northgate fully supports the increased involvement of the voluntary sector in delivering services. The Partnership Fund is a useful method of building capacity in this sector and we would like see the increased use of shared back-office systems between the public and voluntary sectors.

Data collection and sharing

20. In order to lessen the burden of supplying duplicate information to a range of agencies, it is essential that data collection, information and analysis is effectively managed. The type and volume of data collected must be kept under review, using systems flexible enough to respond to changing needs.
21. Northgate welcomed the development of Memorandums of Understanding between central and local government in relation to data protection and information sharing. We would also like to see the development and dissemination of best practice in relation to information sharing both at a national and local level.
22. In the past, people have been let down by the fact that local service providers do not share information in a timely and cost effective manner, have been reactive rather than proactive, and failed to connect with their communities in delivering permanent change.
23. There is no technological reason why, when a person leaves hospital and where the need arises, the appropriate service deliverers cannot be notified so that they jointly provide a proactive, cohesive service to meet the individual's requirements.
24. There, are of course, dangers with such an approach. People's civil rights and security need to be protected, and people's nervousness about giving personal information needs to be addressed. There are ways to overcome this.
25. Step one is to define the services on offer and to deliver them on an incremental basis. Step two is to work with the public to educate and inform them on what whole-life issues are to be addressed. If the public knows and understands this, they are less

Coventry City Council has been able to harness the power of technology to transform its environmental health service. It has now achieved Beacon Council status.

likely to feel nervous about being drawn into something for which they have not given consent. Step three is to establish clear protocols and rules for shared data. Step four is to offer proactive services on the basis of this consent.

Managing IT-enabled change

26. Technology can support transformational government only when individuals and organisations are adequately prepared for change.
27. When introduced without thought, new technology can impact negatively on the overall delivery of public services. If, for example, the public's expectations are raised thus creating increased demand or levels of enquiries which are unable to be serviced. This undermines the trust and legitimacy of public services.
28. Northgate's experience is that although IT projects may be delivered successfully, all too often they fail because of overall programme management. Too little consideration is given to joining up systems and considering the impact of new technology on employees, members of the public and users of the services.
29. Prior to new systems being introduced staff need to be prepared, the impact on services analysed and planned for and pre-emptive measures tackled to meet new demand. There must be adequate measures to deal with change management with key partners involved as members of a partnership board working on the basis of mutual trust and benefit to deliver success.

West Berkshire Council has announced plans to give its employees more control over their affairs, enabling them to record any absence or book their holidays online.

This allows staff to automate many of their tasks, reduce duplication and deliver greater efficiency to the human resources department.

Portfolio management

30. New technology can bring a fresh approach to public consultation and deliver two-way communication. For example through the use of tools such as interactive websites, the type of information displayed can be actively shaped by the direct requests of the citizens accessing the information.
31. Northgate welcomes the move towards portfolio management. This will enable government to plan and

track the success of its transformational programmes more effectively. We believe that this approach must always include a cross-government view on how the public perceives their e-enabled services.

32. Delivering services that are able to focus on the citizen requires new systems and a sea-change in methods of working. Incremental investment and a measured pace to change is increasingly recognised to be a more effective method for achieving such transformative change than the 'big bang' approach often selected by larger public authorities.

Incremental partnership

33. Incremental change is change within the box of what is known in order to strengthen and improve what currently exists through a series of defined steps. The pace and level of change can be dictated by stakeholder concerns and resource issues.
34. Working with private sector partners, incremental partnerships allow public services to pick and choose from the best of the private sector, to place existing systems alongside new expertise and innovation drawn from other sources and to bring together the best mix of solutions to meet changing needs.

About Northgate Information Solutions

We are a technology company with a difference. We are committed to high quality public services. And we understand the public sector. We know how it works, some of its problems and most of its challenges. That knowledge is core to our business.

At Northgate we are sensitive to the internal requirements of our public sector customers, the process of public service delivery and the wider policy agenda surrounding public services. We develop solutions that take all three into account and understand the relationship between them.

Northgate supplies innovative technology solutions to the public sector. Our clear customer focus and collaborative approach helps us to work with a wide range of public services in health, criminal justice, community safety and local and central government. Our task is to enhance public sector value through the intelligent use of information technology and to share in the economic and social benefits that this brings.

Northgate helps communities to achieve healthier, cleaner and safer environments by tackling the issues that are most important to local people. We believe that citizens should be at the heart of public services and be active participants in the delivery of local solutions.

With over thirty years of experience, Northgate's no-nonsense approach helps our partners meet changing demands with the minimum of fuss. We give public authorities the support to innovate and experiment, developing new responses to long-standing problems and anticipating problems that may arise in the future.