

NEWS RELEASE



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Education and effective enforcement – key to tackling truancy

Northgate today warned government that it must avoid a situation where parents of truants were able to gamble on a penalty notice lottery and urged it to give more flexibility for local authorities to distinguish between individuals who can't and won't pay.

In a detailed response to the government's consultation on the education provisions of the Anti Social Behaviour Act 2003, Northgate argues that current proposals will leave local education authorities high and dry if people refuse to pay penalty notices within a given period. Under existing proposals local education authorities will have to withdraw the penalties or prosecute, leaving individuals to gamble on whether or not the LEA will take court action.

Northgate's response suggests that if LEAs apply a policy of prosecuting all who do not pay, this will undermine the government's objective of using penalty notices in instances where prosecution is thought to be too heavy handed. Nor does such a policy take account of whether an individual can't or won't pay, creating further problems for the over-stretched courts.

Northgate calls upon the government to make a number of changes to their proposals including:

- setting up national systems to measure the ability of people to pay penalty notices;
- strengthening public education and information campaigns on the impact of truancy on children's life chances;
- ensuring that if teachers choose to issue penalty notices there should be individual schools' codes of conducts;
- allowing local authorities greater flexibility in dealing with non payment of penalty notices;
- providing more national guidance on human rights and discrimination and best practice.

David Meaden, managing director of Northgate public services, said: "Every child should have the right to fulfil their potential. Truancy affects the life chances of some of our most vulnerable children, particularly those living in deprived areas. Tackling truancy requires public education first and enforcement later.

For enforcement to work it needs to be effective. Our proposals are designed to ensure that parents avoid the stigma of criminal prosecution, and that those who can pay will. Where parents simply cannot, public money should not be wasted on prosecution. Local authorities should be given new powers in the interest of enforcing community justice."

-ENDS-

For further information:

Kathy Sutton 07966 890401

Notes to editors

1. Northgate is a technology services company with a difference. It is committed to high quality public services and understands the public sector. That knowledge is core to its business.
2. Northgate's task is to enhance public sector value through intelligent use of people and information technology systems and to share in the economic and social benefits that this brings.
3. Northgate assists local authorities and the police to promote community well-being by helping them provide citizens with accessible and responsive one-stop services. Northgate is the country's leading provider of penalty notice systems.