

NEWS RELEASE

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Technology assists benefits take-up

Two of Britain's councils – Southampton and Stratford-on-Avon district have teamed up with Northgate Information Solutions to pilot a radical new benefits take-up system which could revolutionise the way benefits are delivered in the UK.

The councils will make use of Northgate's benefits assessment services which use highly sophisticated 'rules based' technology to help frontline staff working in one-stop shops, housing departments and advice centres assist individuals making their way through the benefits maze.

The councils will use non-specialist advisers to guide citizens claiming for council tax or housing benefits through an on-line application to reach a decision based in law. In Southampton the council will work with registered social landlords and advice centres to widen the access of citizens to benefits information. In Stratford-on-Avon district the council is piloting the system in its area office in Southam, allowing residents to obtain advice in a confidential setting.

David Meaden, Managing Director of Northgate Information Solutions Public Services today said: "If we are to improve community well-being we have to ensure that citizens gain full access to their entitlements. Our benefits assessment services, used by the Australian and UK government, provide benefits system parallel to none.

"It radically simplifies the citizen's route to benefits. Our services provide advisers with the relevant questions they need to determine a citizen's eligibility and entitlement. Advisers can tell what evidence is needed to support the claim and create a comprehensive decisions audit trail showing how the decision has been made in law. Local authorities and housing associations gain too. It increases the accuracy of decision-making and speeds up the time in which claims are handled and assessed.

By working collaboratively and in partnership with local authorities and the voluntary sector, we are helping to use technology in an intelligent way which builds up public trust and satisfaction in public services."

Ends

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Notes to editors

1. Northgate Information Solutions is committed to high quality public services and understands the public sector. Its task is to enhance public value through the intelligent use of people and technology. Northgate provides consultancy, software, services and support to a range of public authorities, enabling them to deliver citizen-centred services.
2. Northgate's 'Assert' is an expert system that simplifies the process of benefits assessment. It accurately calculates eligibility and entitlement in one go.