

Department for Work and Pensions

Link-Age

Developing networks of services for older people

Northgate Information Solutions' response

November 2004

Link-Age

Introduction

1. Northgate warmly welcomes the consultation on developing networks of services for older people. Public services should be responsive and accessible for all citizens, raising the quality of life and giving older people confidence that their particular needs will be met.
2. Developing a network of services able to focus on the whole citizen requires new ways of working, both within and between organisations. Northgate's response focuses on the challenges and opportunities arising from a multi-agency approach, including the need to better share information, experience and resources so that public services respond effectively to the needs of all groups.

Community justice: building trust

3. 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. Community justice - in the sense we use it - promotes social inclusion and enforces the administration of civil and criminal justice to ensure that everyone regardless of their experiences and circumstance can achieve their potential in life.
4. The consultation notes that there could be a tension between intervention and well-being. On the contrary, proactive intervention on the basis of need is essential to individual and therefore community well-being. 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.

Focusing on the whole citizen

5. 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.
6. Northgate welcomes the intention to roll out a 'whole person' approach to service delivery. Millions of older people continue to miss out on services and

benefits to which they are entitled through poor information and a lack of joint working.

7. There is no one-size fits all approach to public service delivery. Older people may choose to access services in different ways, but it is crucial that all services are easily and equally accessible. Northgate welcomes the proposals to break down the barriers between organisations and develop a network of services for older people. One that seeks to build on and improve current provision rather than create new structures, maintaining scope for local innovation.
8. Whilst a top-down approach would be unable to deliver multi-agency service networks, there remains a need to develop minimum national standards and best practice guidance under which local flexibility and innovation can be developed.
9. The increased use of Joint Teams to assess financial entitlements and needs across the board is a welcome step in the re-focusing of services on the citizen, minimising disruption and assisting more older people to live independently within the community
10. Consideration should be given to joining the financial assessment process with the health and social care Single Assessment Process in order to further reduce the need for multiple visits and reassure older people that all their needs will be taken into account.
11. Good public service delivery encourages inclusion and the engagement of all people in shaping and delivering services that meet their needs. The consultation rightly recognises the need to increase participation and raise public awareness of the contribution of older people to society and the economy.

Multi-agency working

12. 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.
13. Multi-agency working therefore 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.

14. 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.
15. Northgate fully supports the increased involvement of the voluntary sector in delivering services to older people. 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

16. 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.
17. Northgate welcomes 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.
18. In the past, vulnerable older people have been let down by the fact that local service providers do not share intelligence and 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.
19. Partnership, prediction and prevention are crucial to improving services for older people. The real core to prevention is ensuring timely information, accurate analysis and improved problem solving and investigation to ensure that speedy action can be taken by the relevant agency.
20. 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.
21. 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.
22. 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 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.

New technology and incremental partnership

23. The consultation highlights the contribution of technology to multi-agency working and access to services. New technology can improve these processes so long as individuals and organisations are adequately prepared for change.
24. New technology, when introduced without thought, 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.
25. 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.
26. 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.
27. New technology can also 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.
28. Moving towards a network of services that remain 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.
29. 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.

30. 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 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, from access to high quality healthcare to anti-social behaviour. 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.