

Response to Home Office white paper

**Building Communities, Beating Crime: a better
police service for the 21st century**

Northgate Information Solutions' response

February 2005

Policing: building communities, beating crime

Introduction

Northgate warmly welcomes the government's white paper on policing. Building a new relationship between the police and the public through neighbourhood policing is crucial to delivering a high quality police service that enjoys the support, trust and direct involvement of local citizens.

All public services must adapt to citizens' demands for services that are more responsive to individual need, and with citizens' radically changing expectations. People want to live in a safe and secure society whilst accessing services in their own time, at the right time. Local communities need to know that their concerns will be addressed, irrespective of how their local services are organised. This knowledge must underpin the drive for more citizen-centred policing.

But the police service alone cannot build better communities. Joint working between the police and emergency services, health services, local authorities and the wider community is essential to delivering community justice.

Focusing on customer service

As society has changed, people's expectations have changed. Where once standardised public services met public need, now citizens increasingly expect services which are seamless and tailored to personal preference. Northgate welcomes the proposals to embed a customer service culture within policing. One that provides citizens with reassurance that their concerns will be dealt with, and can harness the support of actively engaged citizens through constructive feedback and much-needed intelligence.

There is no one-size fits all approach to service delivery. Citizens want to be able to access services in ways which are convenient to them; and to know that their needs can be met quickly and effectively. Local flexibility should operate within a national framework, and we welcome the commitment to build on the proposed national minimum standards for customer service via a 'contract' with communities. However, steps must be taken to ensure that the monitoring of performance in this area does not add significantly to the existing bureaucratic burden.

We have long supported the planned introduction of a new three-digit number for non-emergency calls to improve citizens' access to services. This number could be used to access a wider range of public services across organisations such as local authorities and the voluntary sector where appropriate. It is particularly important that the introduction of the new number follows a programme of public education on the role of the police and partner agencies. This should also inform the development of the national call handling strategy.

Misuse of the 999 number has both financial and customer service implications. Citizens will lose faith in a service that does not deliver, regardless of whether the perceived responsibilities of that service were correctly identified. It is essential that all relevant agencies, in particular local authorities, are involved in the development as well as the implementation of the new system. This requires a strong emphasis on effective change management, particularly if customer service assessment is to form part of upcoming inspection arrangements.

New technology

Used appropriately, new technology can transform public services by redefining the relationship between the service and the citizen. An incremental rather than 'big bang' approach should be considered to allow the services available through the new non-emergency number to be added in stages.

Large scale changes in technology sometimes fail to bring about the public service improvements envisaged because of failures in overall project management. Often too little thought is given to considering the impact of new technology on employees, users or members of the public.

Only if the relevant change management strategies have been put in place can technology add value to services. As the service develops and public perception improves, calls to the new non-emergency number will increase. Prior to new services being introduced, staff should be prepared, the impact on service development analysed and pre-emptive measures be put in place to deal with any new demand.

The white paper highlights the importance of seeing things 'from the public's point of view'. Citizen-centred policing requires those handling calls to have all the information they need at their fingertips. This is as true for the new non-emergency number as it is for 999 calls. Accurate and timely data and intelligence is critical to modern policing and we welcome the introduction of a statutory code of practice on information management. It is essential that the code is kept under review to optimise the type of data collected, how it is analysed and to whom it is available.

Multi-agency working

Crime and anti-social behaviour does not respect boundaries. The sharing of information between all agencies responsible for community justice is crucial. Multi-agency working creates challenges for all public sector bodies used to working in 'silos'. It requires new forms of leadership and new methods of working within and between public sector bodies. More formal information-sharing and exchange networks between local authorities, the police and other public bodies enables the provision of proactive and holistic services tailored to individual need.

There is no technical reason why a citizen's request for publicly available information on policing should not in future be accessible through local authority systems, and vice versa, be they accessed online, face to face in one stop shops or over the telephone.

Northgate supports the joint duty on police and local authorities to ensure they have sufficient arrangements in place to deliver engagement opportunities. However, in a multi-agency context there must be clear lines of responsibility and accountability, particularly when separate responsibilities in related areas can fall to police authorities, police forces or CDRPs.

Multi-agency working encompasses cross-border as well as cross-agency cooperation, and we welcome in particular proposals for a duty on police authorities to cooperate with neighbouring authorities.

Engaging communities

Northgate believes that local communities have a powerful role to play in promoting community justice and in crime prevention and reduction programmes. Local people need to feed into existing forums, bringing a fresh approach and contributing to the development of practical solutions.

If people are to have trust in the police service, we must develop citizen-based services in which individuals actively contribute to more effective neighbourhood policing. Within a national framework, local priorities should be determined by a combination of people's needs and an area's problems, taking into account the difference in policing required in rural areas and large conurbations.

The public benefits most from services that are based on a real understanding of their needs. A thorough understanding of structures and accountability within the police service may be essential for those operating within it. This level of understanding is not as crucial for individual citizens. Success comes through

innovation and collaboration between all stakeholders, be they businesses, voluntary bodies, statutory agencies or individual citizens.

The white paper proposes to introduce minimum standards for the information provided to communities on policing. Northgate welcomes the move towards better communication and the recognition that, where possible, information should be used by existing forms such as local authority newsletters. However, we would like to see further consideration of such initiatives being led from the outset by the crime and disorder reduction partnerships as the focal point for multi-agency working in the this area.

We support an enhanced role for councillors in promoting the concerns of communities in this area. This could help to reinvigorate local democracy and raise public participation. However, this is a need to ensure that the public are aware of the levels of representation available, and its aim, in order to avoid unnecessary confusion.

Neighbourhood policing

Increased community engagement is crucial to maintaining support for and trust in the police service. People need to understand broadly how a service works and who is responsible in order to feel secure that their needs or concerns will be dealt with quickly and effectively. Citizens should also know or be able to easily identify who their local officers are and find out what is being done to tackle crime in their area.

Communities also need to feel confident that their specific needs are being taken into account in the development of services, and we support the extension of 'flexible funding' through the Neighbourhood Policing Fund.

Visibility is a key component of community engagement. We welcome the proposals for dedicated neighbourhood policing teams. Given appropriate training and resources, the extended use of the wider police family can help increase visibility and improve prevention, reduce the administrative burden on the police and ensure effective enforcement where offences are committed.

Penalty notices

Local people place quality of life issues such as fear of crime and minor disorder at the top of their priorities. Where people feel that their day-to-day concerns are being ignored, they are less likely to trust the ability of public authorities to deliver fair and efficient public services.

Used appropriately, penalty notices can be an effective way of dealing with high-volume low-level crime, nuisance and other forms of minor civil infringements of

the law which are currently either processed through the courts or where no action is currently taken. They give public authorities with limited resources an additional means of dealing efficiently with minor offences. A proactive approach to promoting community safety and well-being, backed up by a system of penalty notice administration where clear and decisive action is taken to tackle individual concerns, could help to enhance public trust and improve service delivery.

Whilst penalty notices may provide an efficient and cost-effective means of dealing with minor offences, the penalty notice system is only as fair as it is operated. This means that particular attention should be paid to the training and resources of those who issue and enforce them. Police officers, CSOs and accredited persons should be adequately equipped to understand how human rights and diversity issues impact on service delivery and be able to deal with the public in a courteous, fair, equitable and consistent fashion. Penalty notices must be used proportionately and flexibly.

Any extended use of penalty notices should take place as part of a comprehensive education and enforcement programme, with clear standards set for the quality of enforcement. Enforcement systems must be responsive, transparent, accountable, equitable and audited.

Proactive policing

Criminal justice and public safety bodies are under increased pressure to deliver preventative and proactive strategies. The effective management of resources can be radically improved by predictive services which allow the allocation of resources closer to the point of need. Proactive services actively engage in developing and planning whole-life services and take measures to prevent harm to the community through risk management and predictive analysis.

Data collection is an essential part of this process. The police can monitor, predict, prevent and tackle crime more efficiently through the use of technology. This requires the ability to pull together information from disparate sources and bodies of statistics to identify adverse patterns and trends. This may indicate patterns by predictive analysis, rather than by relying solely on reactive policing.

Best practice and performance management

Whilst the proposals to 'trigger action' by communities if service do not improve could help to raise performance, it is essential that the mechanisms are in place to avoid its use. If the police and communities are to have confidence in performance management systems they need to know that they are open, transparent,

accountable and equitable and that its primary function is to improve services rather than to punish poor performance.

It is essential that where good practice in service delivery is identified, the appropriate measures are in place to share this experience. Northgate warmly welcomes the establishment of a new police improvement agency to ensure the sharing and further development of best practice in policing.

Further information

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About Northgate Information Solutions

Northgate is 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 has helped us to work with all 52 police authorities and over a quarter of local authorities. 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 a safer, cleaner and healthier environment by tackling the issues that are most important to local people, from anti-social behaviour to urban congestion. We believe that citizens should be at the heart of public services and be active participants in the delivery of local solutions.

New powers often create new headaches for public authorities, pressed for time and resources. 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.

- Northgate assists local authorities, the police and the emergency services to raise local standards by helping them provide citizens with accessible and responsive one-stop services. Our local authority clients at Halton and Swale Borough Councils have won awards in recognition of their contribution to e-government.
- Northgate helps deliver solutions to high-profile environmental problems. We provide enforcement systems for Transport for London's congestion charging scheme, reducing delays and pollution in the capital.
- Northgate works in partnership with the government and police to give forces and local authorities the tools they need to deal effectively and efficiently

with anti-social behaviour. We are the biggest provider of penalty notice software systems to the police.

- Northgate provides managed services across numerous sectors, public and private, including the first fully managed service for Devon & Cornwall Police Authority.
- Northgate helps the emergency and other services to co-ordinate their work, providing them with the means to predict and prevent emergencies and crimes from occurring in the first place and to allow them to use their resources in the most efficient and effective of fashions.
- Northgate supports national road safety and local traffic management strategies. We are the UK's leading provider of vehicle penalty and fixed penalty enforcement systems.
- Northgate manages benefit systems for local authorities such as Camden, streamlining the benefits process and allowing citizens easier access to the support that they need.
- Northgate works in close partnership with many public sector organizations such as the GLA, helping them focus on the delivery of their core services by managing a wide range of human resource tasks, such as payroll, that require high levels of administration.

Northgate's services allow public authorities to focus on public service delivery, reducing the administrative burden. By using our systems, public authorities spend less time chasing the paper trail and more time improving the quality of life for local communities and their citizens.

Northgate helps public authorities to implement national policy through local delivery. When public authorities benefit, the community does too.