

Scottish Executive Justice Department

Supporting Police, Protecting Communities
Northgate Information Solutions' response

May 2005

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Introduction

- Northgate warmly welcomes the Scottish Executive's consultation on the proposed Scottish Police Bill. The consultation contains a number of important proposals aimed at strengthening the police service and encouraging joint working with other law enforcement agencies.
- Northgate's response focuses largely on the proposals to deliver efficiency and effectiveness through the use of common support services and the creation of a single Service Authority.
- Our response:
 - i. welcomes the proposal for a single Service Authority as an essential step in the modernisation of the Scottish police service;
 - ii. calls for a citizen-centred approach to be placed at the heart of police reform in Scotland;
 - iii. recommends a strategic approach to information sharing and the use of technology to underpin multi-agency working;
 - iv. recommends an holistic approach to, and the regular review of, the use of police resources in support of greater efficiencies.

Citizen-centred policing

1. Strengthening the relationship between the police and the public is crucial to delivering a high quality police service that enjoys the support, trust and direct involvement of Scottish citizens.
2. Northgate warmly welcomes the proposal to create a new single Service Authority. Providing the police with unified support systems, tailored to the particular needs of Scotland, will help to reduce the bureaucratic burden on forces and free up officers' time to provide communities with reassurance that their concerns will be dealt with.
3. 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, irrespective of how their local services are organised. Northgate welcomes the consultation's

emphasis on delivering ongoing improvements through regular reviews of the operational policing structure.

4. But the police service alone cannot build better communities, and the consultation acknowledges the existing multi-agency work of the Service Authority bodies, such as the Scottish Criminal Record Office. It is essential that joint working between police and criminal justice organisations, other emergency services, health services, local authorities and the wider community is both maintained and strengthened to deliver an efficient, citizen-centred police service in Scotland.

Multi-agency working

5. 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 the police and other public authorities are crucial. So too is developing relationships with the voluntary sector and recognising the benefits of developing innovative relationships with the private sector which add to the public value and strengthen public services.
6. The process of creating a new Service Authority has the potential to radically improve the sharing of information and resources between the common police services, and between the police service and other bodies. Although it is envisaged that there will be minimal changes to service delivery at this stage, it is nonetheless essential that adequate systems are in place to ensure a smooth transition. The use of technology has the power to radically improve service delivery and release further resources to the front line, but only when the appropriate change management strategies have been put in place.

New technology

7. 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.
8. When used appropriately, new technology can transform public services by redefining the relationship between the service and the citizen. Northgate believes that an incremental rather than 'big bang' approach to service integration should be considered to ensure a seamless transition to a single Service Authority. This process will enable the strategic assessment of police resources, including IT provision, across the board.

9. It is essential that the police and other criminal justice agencies can access accurate information and intelligence when and where they need to. The police can monitor, predict, prevent and tackle crime more efficiently through the use of technology, but the quality of the underlying data is critical. The new Service Authority will have responsibility for promoting the exchange of information between police forces in Scotland, and Northgate recommends a thorough analysis of data quality across the common police services to ensure that the new Authority can take a strategic approach to multi-agency working and future IT provision.

Efficient use of resources

10. Northgate believes the joining of the common police services provides a unique opportunity to take an holistic review of all the resources available to the police.
11. Northgate's experience is that too much time is wasted in duplicating records, in carrying out routine tasks and finding, rather than on acting upon, information. The new Service Authority will have responsibility for a range of mutually-supportive functions, including training, information technology, resource allocation, performance management, best value and efficiency. There are a number of opportunities to harness the power of the information contained within these often discrete systems.
12. Northgate welcomes the review of police forces' back office systems currently being undertaken by the Executive, and recommends that the review also examines the potential to link the systems to deliver a more citizen-centred service, as well as linking up police force systems to deliver efficiencies. For example, in the improved deployment of staff based on training and in the use of IT to better communicate relevant performance data to the public.
13. Success comes through flexibility, innovation and collaboration between all stakeholders, and we support the proposals for the legislation to contain an enabling provision to allow the functions of the Service Authority to be added or removed. It is essential that the Authority works closely with the ACPOS Business Benefits Unit, tasked with identifying and sharing best practice across the Scottish police forces.
14. Northgate would also like to see consideration by the Scottish Executive of providing incentives for police forces to share their back and front office systems; freeing up resources to enable them to concentrate on their core business of crime prevention.

About Northgate

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.

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.

Northgate assists the emergency services, local authorities and the police to promote community well-being by helping them provide citizens with accessible and responsive one-stop services based on clear and detailed information. In the UK, Northgate works with four out of five local authorities, all police forces and over a half of fire brigades and ambulance trusts.

Northgate and community justice

For Northgate, community justice encompasses rights and responsibilities; help and punishment; and entitlements and enforcement. A safe and secure community promotes social cohesion, economic progress and environmental improvement as the guarantors of sustainable success.

Community safety is an essential part of community justice. The public needs and has the right to expect fire, rescue and emergency services which meet the growing challenges of: terrorism and major incidents; of refocusing activities to prevention through effective risk management strategies; and of targeting resources to meet that risk.

If communities are to enjoy a sense of well-being, individual citizens need to be able to access their rights and shape public services according to their needs. Healthy communities must educate and inform individuals and organisations about their rights and their responsibilities. But where crimes and misdemeanours are committed the civil and criminal justice systems must enforce the law in a proportionate and equitable fashion.

We all have to take responsibility for promoting community safety at a local level and educating and protecting future generations from harm. Preventing fires and promoting safety should not be left to fire and rescue services alone. A co-ordinated effort by a range of public services is vital to promoting community safety. The public has to accept their responsibilities to co-operate with public services in order to ensure the quality of life of local citizens.