

# Credit crunch-councils fight back to improve citizens' services

Submitted by: Fellows Associates

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Wycombe District Council and Northgate Public Services today announce that they have formed an innovative, incremental partnership which will improve customer services in Wycombe. The agreement will see the establishment of a Regional Shared Services Centre designed to advance and promote transformation of council processes across the South East.

From Monday 6th July 2009 Northgate took over responsibility for the management of Wycombe's Customer Service Centre. Under Northgate's leadership, employees will benefit from improved investment and support, as their skills and capabilities are developed to meet changing demand.

The partnership is focused on radically improving customer experience and supporting business processes within the council. It will help to increase residents' satisfaction at a time when services are under extreme pressure and unprecedented demand. It will enable customers to benefit from service enhancements and the Council to radically improve the way it deals with enquiries with improved response times, better information processing, and customer service.

The partnership will not only deliver immediate efficiencies to the Council, in the longer term, it will proactively seek other public service and not for profit organisations as additional partners to develop the Regional Shared Services Centre. It is anticipated that this could bring in substantial revenues coupled with guaranteed cost savings over the course of the five year partnership. The success of the Regional Shared Services Centre will also help to boost jobs in the town.

This partnership builds upon a successful ICT managed services relationship between Wycombe District Council and Northgate which has already delivered productivity gains from service level consistency. The proposed centre is the first of a number of regional excellence centres planned by Northgate as one of its responses to the challenges faced by the public sector over future years. The centres are aimed at providing public bodies and community organisations with new opportunities to radically overhaul business processes, improve services, and generate cost efficiencies through economies of scale and shared resources.

Councillor Roger Colomb, Wycombe District Council's cabinet member for procurement and customer services said today: "This partnership is first and foremost about delivering positive outcomes for our residents. Wycombe District Council is committed to providing excellent customer service. We recognise that we have to improve the way that we engage and deliver services to our residents in these difficult economic times. At the heart of what we are doing are major service improvements combined with value for money for our council taxpayers.

"We are delighted to be working with Northgate on this innovative, joint venture, and in the longer term, we are hopeful that ultimately other authorities, public services and community-based organisations in the South East will work with us to make the Regional Shared Services centre a major success."

Joe Bradley, Managing Director, Citizen Services, Northgate Public Services, said today: "These are difficult times for councils across the UK. They are faced with increased demand and extreme pressure on

resources. People not only want more but better services. We are committed to transforming the way that services relate to people and their needs, and to reaching out to the most disadvantaged in our communities.

“Wycombe Council shares our values and our vision. We are delighted that it has chosen to become part of our South East Regional Service Centre. Over the next year, we aim to establish regional centres of customer excellence throughout the UK. These will help public bodies deliver better services for less and provide guaranteed cashable savings over the lifetime of a contract. So long as councils like Wycombe wake up to the challenge, they can deliver the successful services that their communities have a right to expect.”

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Notes to editors:

1. Wycombe District Council serves an area of approximately 125 square miles and a population of 162,000. The District is situated south west of Buckinghamshire and is linked to the M40 at 3 junctions - 3, 4 and 5, with rail links to Birmingham and London Marylebone via the Chiltern Railways line. The District has three historic town centres - urban High Wycombe, the small town of Princes Risborough and Marlow on the River Thames.

2. Northgate Public Services is an innovative provider of transformation and improvement services to the public sector. It is committed to high quality public services that place individuals and their communities at their heart. Its knowledge and understanding of people's needs are core to its business, as too, is its depth and breadth across public services.

3. Northgate's task is to enhance public value through the intelligent use of people and technology; to understand why and what change is necessary; to provide new thinking leading to improved performance; and to link company rewards with positive outcomes for the communities for whom it works. It supports transformation through sustainable performance partnerships.

4. In the UK, Northgate works with ninety five per cent of local authorities, every police force, and a large number of health organisations, housing associations, utilities and transport companies.