

# Northgate supports Birmingham's drive to transform planning services

Submitted by: Fellows Associates

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Birmingham City Council's pioneering e-planning service has been singled out as a leading example of service excellence in the UK, helping to transform public services to be more responsive to people's needs.

Planning Management which is part of the Planning and Regeneration Service has recently achieved the Customer Service Excellence standard. This is the UK national standard of customer service excellence for public sector organisations overseen by the Cabinet Office.

Birmingham Planning Management deals with planning advice and all of the planning applications for city buildings. It has two main customer groups – the citizens of Birmingham and agents and developers.

Planning Management has formed an innovative partnership with Northgate Public Services. This is designed to streamline, simplify and strengthen planning services. It aims to make them more transparent, and engage the wider community in the process through the intelligent use of online services and technology. The partnership has been praised in the Service Excellence assessment report for improving services and making them more effective.

Planning Management supports the council's Business Transformation Strategy, the largest transformation programme within local government in the UK. This seeks to revolutionise the way that services are delivered to citizens who live, learn, work in or visit Birmingham.

The national stamp of approval for Planning Management is based on partnership delivery of efficient and effective services. These include self-service systems which give citizens the opportunity to track the progress of planning applications, submit their responses, review decision notices and resolve queries and full mobile services which allow planning officers to spend more time engaging with their communities. Streamlined processes enable the council to meet national performance standards, and share information where necessary with other agencies. Council officers are able to provide a faster and more accurate enquiry services by having instant access to information so that they can provide immediate feedback to their customers on planning policy and guidance.

Cllr Peter Douglas Osborn, Birmingham City Council's Planning Committee Chairman, said today: "We are delighted that our partnership has been singled out for praise. Effective partnership is all about shared understanding and dedication to improved outcomes. Northgate Public Services, like us, is wholly committed to building services around the needs of citizens. This achievement proves that we are well and truly on the road to revolutionising planning services in Birmingham."

Russell Osborne, Managing Director of Citizen Solutions at Northgate Public Services, said today: "Now more than ever councils need to invest in online planning and realise the benefits from this. Councils can save precious resources by eradicating waste and inefficiency. However, it is equally important to create better services which build public trust and are more effective in responding to the needs of individuals and local communities. We are ambitious for change and our partnership with Birmingham is

achieving it.”

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Notes to Editors

1. Birmingham City Council is the largest Metropolitan District in the United Kingdom and employs 50,000 staff servicing a residential population of over one million and 27,000 businesses within an area of 26,785 hectares. It is the largest local authority in Europe serving over one million citizens. Planning Management forms part of the Development and Culture Directorate of the City Council. It employs 109 staff. The Customer Service Excellence assessment report praised Planning Management for its deep understanding and commitment to service excellence. This commitment was found through senior line managers to operational and front line employees.

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. Founded in 1969, the company has nearly 8,000 employees.

5. Business Transformation is Birmingham City Council's ambitious nine-strand programme which aims to modernise and enhance services delivered across the whole authority to citizens. It is projected that the programme will realise benefits of around £1billion over the ten years to 2016.