

NHSCR Governance Board Nhscr And The Citizen's Account

Background

1. The Citizen's Account is a voluntary local authority scheme under which each citizen can apply to have an account recording all entitlements and transactions related to that individual. The Account will be linked to a smartcard recording the particular citizen's entitlement to certain public services (including free transport under the recently-inaugurated national travel scheme). The Account is only set up with the informed consent of the citizen to the data sharing involved, and no service is withheld for lack of that consent.

The NHSCR's Role

2. Rather than having 32 completely separate databases, a National Infrastructure has been set up, including a database containing basic information about everyone who holds or has held an Account, identified by a unique number. The NHS number is the best available identifier and the business processes used by the NHSCR have been reused as the basis for the national infrastructure. Essentially, GROS is now providing for local authorities, through the NHSCR, a similar service to that provided for the NHS.

Progress

3. A Proof of Concept trial, completed in December 2005, demonstrated that it was feasible for the NHSCR to play the planned part in allocating a unique number for citizens who had applied for an Account. That formed part of the system which delivered the first batch of entitlement cards in time for the introduction of the new national travel scheme. The work identified the importance of closer co-ordination between the CHI and NHSCR, particularly for records of people who have been on the NHSCR database since its inception in 1939 – and work has been put in hand to achieve that.

4. The Local Electoral Administration and Registration Service (Scotland) Bill, which was introduced in the Scottish Parliament in December, includes a section giving the Registrar General explicit powers to run the NHSCR, and to share information with local authorities in the way envisaged for the citizen's account. Relevant section of the Bill is attached. It has not so far been the subject of comment and is not mentioned in the recently-published report on the Bill by the Local Government and Transport Committee, which will be debated by the full Parliament on 4 May. If the Bill progresses smoothly, it will become law in the summer.

5. Pending these new powers, the NHSCR has only been able to provide to the citizen's account NHS numbers for people born in Scotland, whose NHS number appears on their birth register entry, which is a public document. Other citizens have an NHS number assigned by the NHSCR, which is not public: for the citizen's account, they have been assigned an interim number which will be replaced by the true number once the Bill goes through.

Recommendation

6. The Board is invited to note progress with the intention to use the NHSCR database to provide information for the national infrastructure of the Citizen's Account.

**General Register Office for Scotland
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