

CAPITA

Case Study

Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership creates a unique venture



For many small local authorities, to realise the economies of scale would be an advantage, but few are in a position to take that step. With the support of Capita Software Services, the district councils of Breckland and Forest Heath have created a unique venture - The Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership - to cut costs and improve performance.

The background

Using Council Tax, Benefits, Income Management and Counter Receipting modules from Capita since 1997, Breckland DC had a modern IT system. In contrast, Forest Heath DC relied on an old ICL-based mainframe for business rates, housing benefits and Council Tax. It also faced withdrawal of IT support. Quite independently, both authorities undertook a best value review of their revenues and benefits services.

“As part of its best value process, Forest Heath DC put out a tender for revenue services. Breckland DC responded and started to talk to them,” said Steve Knights, Strategic Partnership Manager, Breckland District Council. “We also wanted to improve our revenues services and to reduce the costs of administration.”

Making savings

A decision was soon reached to work together. While this would help cost cutting, managers further believed that a larger service was ideal for variable workloads. There was a mutual recognition that sharing IT provision, including new developments for eGovernment, would be advantageous too.

Breckland DC was well served by its Capita software, needing only the Business Rates module. Although using Breckland DC’s IT investment for the new partnership made sense, this had to be tested and verified under procurement rules. A proposal from Capita Software Services and Breckland DC offered Forest Heath DC a six figure saving in IT costs.

Breckland District Council and Forest Heath District Council are neighbouring local authorities in Norfolk and Suffolk respectively. Centred around Attleborough, Dereham, Swaffham, Thetford and Watton, Breckland DC has a population of 121,000. Forest Heath DC includes Newmarket, Mildenhall and Brandon, with a population of 55,000.

“Forest Heath made sure they were comfortable with the Capita Revenues and Benefits system. For example, they liked the way that the benefits subsidy was calculated easily and how the Council Tax system worked too,” said Knights.

A new UNIX server was installed at Breckland for the expansion. Capita Software Services then undertook data conversion. ICL’s housing benefit information system was migrated to Capita’s Windows-based Benefits system, ICL Council Tax to Capita’s Windows-based Council Tax and ICL Business Rates to Capita Windows-based Non-Domestic Rates modules.

Throughout the project, Capita Software Services provided project management, business and technical consultancy with helpdesk services. It also prepared Forest Heath DC for the new environment - 25 people were trained to work alongside 70 Breckland staff.

“ We provided a project team, Capita provided a project team and we worked together to solve any issues that arose. ”

“It was also possible for assistance to be given to Forest Heath from Breckland during the conversion to Capita software, by providing a backlog busting team and a training officer to assist with the implementation. By doing this, a very smooth implementation was possible with minimal impact on ongoing service delivery,” continued Knights.

In August 2003, the new partnership went live. Four months later the final phase - Breckland's non-domestic rates converted from Sandersons - was complete. Forest Heath DC now processes new housing benefit claims ten days quicker on average than before. Collection rates in Council Tax are up in both authorities too. For example, Breckland DC is about a month ahead in revenue collections than the previous year.

Joined-up working

Working together is more than just sharing IT. There are joint committees, common management and new processes to improve customer service. Leaflets, letters and forms have been unified along with desktops, now Microsoft Windows 2000 with Office software.

“We're very pleased with Capita Software Services and have worked well with them. They're part of our team. Capita is also prompt to bring in software improvements too,” said Knights.

There's been a six percent saving on running costs despite an 11 percent benefits workload increase. Forest Heath DC is enjoying a huge reduction in annual maintenance costs having left the ICL environment.

By providing management expertise to its partner, Breckland has reduced staff costs.

Future vision

Government funding has now been tapped for new projects. Using Capita Direct, eGovernment is opening up access for customers wishing to manage their accounts and claims online.

Another project that will improve the efficiency of revenues and benefits officers is the deployment of Capita's Streetwise and HP iPAQ pocket PCs for mobile computing. And the hunt is on for new local authority partners to enable costs to be driven down further while also improving overall service provision.

It all means renewed excellence in service delivery and achieving best value. The combined resources offer better, faster and more cost-effective services to the customer. Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership is a robust and flexible organisation, able to take change in its stride. Those tough government performance targets no longer seem quite so hard. Knights concludes:

“ We can now provide a whole package with Capita Software Services. There's mutual advantages in procuring IT through a partnership in the way that we have with Forest Heath DC. ”

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