CAPITA
IB SOLUTIONS

Hartlepool Borough Council

Situated on the north-east coast of England, Hartlepool Borough Council serves a population of 92,200. The Council became a unitary authority in 1996, following the abolition of Cleveland County Council. Hartlepool is one of the country's best performing local authorities - assessed as a 'four star' authority under Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA). This is the highest possible rating and was awarded by the Audit Commission for the sixth consecutive year.

Customer	**Solutions**	Employee Expenses	Purchase Ledger
Hartlepool Borough Council	Integra Enterprise	General Ledger	Purchase Ordering
Market Sector	Budgeting	ICE	Purchase-to-Pay
Local Government	Business Intelligence	Invoice Approval	Sales Ledger
Country	Cash Management	Job Billing	Stock Management
United Kingdom	eSeries	Project Billing	Time Recording

Introduction

Streamlining financial systems is a significant challenge for every type of enterprise, in both the private and public sectors. It also offers the opportunity to bring costs under control, improve performance and provide more timely management reporting capabilities to aid better decision-making.

These were among the reasons that first persuaded Hartlepool Borough Council to review the authority's financial processes and procedures, including replacing the outdated General Ledger and Management Information System with a more flexible, fully integrated accounting function.

The Requirement

Officers at the council reviewed the authority's financial systems five years ago and concluded that its numerous, disparate systems were a source of major inefficiencies.

"The previously separate job costing system required significant volumes of creditor invoice transactions to be regularly transferred to the core purchase ledger system so that the invoices could be paid," explains Kevin Johnston, Group Accountant for Financial Services at Hartlepool.

Moreover, the authority's system could not support electronic transactions, something that clearly would be much more efficient in the longer term.

"We wanted to make savings on administration, and also better equip ourselves to track how money was being spent in order to find further efficiencies," says Mr Johnston.

The Solution

The authority decided to invest in a new, integrated financial information management system – the Integra Enterprise system by Capita IB Solutions – that also enabled the electronic transmission of all documentation.

The investment has successfully brought together the different systems Hartlepool used to have into a much more integrated whole, explains Mr Johnston.

The authority decided to introduce the new system in phases. First, it installed the core modules, including general ledger, purchase ledger, sales ledger and bank reconciliation.

In the second phase, the job costing, job billing and stock management modules brought together information that had previously been held and processed in separate systems.

The third phase of the project introduced significant new processes into the purchase-to-pay cycle, including webbased ordering and the implementation of Integra eSeries.

Finally, the council added Capita IB Solutions' Integra 'Business Intelligence' module, which allows it to manage its financial data more proactively, in turn giving a better insight into how and where money is being spent and, crucially, a much clearer picture of where it might be possible to make efficiencies.

The Benefits

The result, explains Mr Johnston, is that the authority has benefited from significant savings in the cost of administration.

Previously, for example, the administration or finance teams would run budget reports and then send them out to the relevant staff. Now transactions are paperless and, because information is held on one system, it can be sent out in a much more cost-effective way. "This used to take quite a lot of resource – and paper – printing them out, sorting them and sending to the relevant budget holders. This is now a fully automated process," says Mr Johnston.

Another feature of the system's report-writing tool is that it automatically e-mails budget holders up-to-date information to their desktops on a monthly basis.

They can then drill down to individual transactions, including scanned copies of documents, so all the information can be accessed from a single report in their inbox. Previously, they had to sign on to the system and search for information.

"Before, there was a lot of maverick spending and it was very difficult to monitor. The new system allowed us to tackle this," says Mr Johnston.

The new system has also improved decision-making, something Mr Johnston says will be invaluable as Hartlepool strives to identify further efficiencies. "Now, everything can be monitored more easily and non-contracted spending has been reduced," he adds.

The Future

Beyond its more immediate benefits, the performance, reliability and scalability of Integra Enterprise gives the Council an opportunity to replace its disparate software applications and information systems with a single, integrated solution, at its own pace.