

CAPITA

Integrated business solutions

Staffordshire Moorlands District Council

With increasing pressure to meet the public sector objectives for reduced costs and improved efficiencies, many District Councils are struggling to implement and support the required level of technology complexity. In December 2007, High Peak Borough Council and Staffordshire Moorlands District Council announced plans to establish a Strategic Alliance under the management of a single, shared Chief Executive and to develop a joint Transformation Programme.



Introduction

The wider project included a shared approach to delivering services, in order to achieve operational savings and efficiencies. The Strategic Alliance is not a merger, as both councils will remain separate legal entities within their respective County boundaries.

April 2009 saw the launch of a shared grounds maintenance service between High Peak Borough Council, Staffordshire Moorlands District Council and Cheadle Town Council.

The service is one of several to have already emerged from the Strategic Alliance.

Other shared services already up and running include environmental health, a Clean Team for responsive street cleaning, and a single Chief Executive's Office responsible for functions such as health and safety, communications, policy development and public consultation.

The Requirement

The Transformation Programme aims to review 19 service areas across the two councils, and aims to deliver £1.1m savings from 2010/11 onwards.

The savings will enable both councils to remain financially viable and allow for additional investment in priority areas.

In common with other local authorities, High Peak Borough Council and Staffordshire Moorlands District Council have seen the role of IT transformed over the last decade; technology now plays a fundamental role in meeting targets for efficiency, cost reduction and improved citizen services

However, like many other District Councils without the budget for significant in-house IT resources, the Strategic Alliance has had to balance the required functionality with cost – both of the initial investment and of ongoing support.

It became obvious from an early stage that both cooperation between and integration of, the two authorities required some standardisation of back office processes and systems. A shared set of financial systems was seen as key in enabling Alliance staff to carry out their responsibilities across both authorities and to enable the development of a combined finance team.

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The Solution

In September 2009, agreement was reached between Staffordshire Moorlands District Council and Capita to roll out Integra Open Enterprise across the Strategic Alliance.

The application suite was already in use at Staffordshire Moorlands District Council, and it was decided to deploy the application both to High Peak Borough Council and High Peak Community Housing.

“The decision to choose Integra in the first place was taken some seven years ago, based on price and performance at the time,” says Bernard Walker, Senior Business Analyst for Staffordshire Moorlands District Council. “Integra has been in use as the primary accounting system at SMDC over that period, and has proven to be a solid, reliable and cost effective accounting system, coupled with Crystal Reports, Integra has delivered the financial control that we require.”

The adoption of a multi-company version of Integra is allowing the development of shared administration, recording and reporting processes, which enables all finance staff to use one set of tools and rules, and provides clients across both authorities with a consistent and shared output.

Multi company also allows separate core financial records to be maintained for both authorities, while all staff can easily access information and process transactions for either. Bernard Walker continues, “High Peak Borough Council also has an Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) running its housing stock. The Strategic Alliance offered an opportunity for them to update their financials by adopting Integra and to benefit from having the software hosted and maintained by the local authority. Owing to the separate structure of the ALMO, a separate Integra environment has been adopted. This allows the ALMO to retain total responsibility for the administration, structure and processes applied. In this way the Alliance and the ALMO can share resources and expertise, but the latter retains control over its accounting records.”

The Benefits

The benefits of utilising a single application suite using a common Chart of Accounts structure were key to selecting Integra Open Enterprise. The system configuration will enable both organisation-specific and consolidating reporting, as required.

This will enable the councils to focus on joint procurements, streamlining suppliers and improving benchmarking of performance.

The Integra solution included implementation and deployment of the web-based “self-service” module, eSeries, which will also provide the councils with a platform from which to address the wider areas of the government’s efficiency agenda and which will support a strong eProcurement initiative, in line with government objectives.

The Future

In addition to rationalising their supplier numbers and renegotiating contracts, the Council’s plan to use eProcurement to further reduce costs by generating electronic orders to suppliers and streamlining the purchase to pay process. The next phase of the Strategic Alliance will be a move toward centralised financial transactional processing.