

POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL

Squeezing value in use from self-service and business process re-engineering

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Transactions & Systems Manager, Powys County Council

Powys County Council was created in 1974 and merged with constituent district councils in 1996 to become a Unitary Authority. The council has 73 elected councillors and employs around 8,000 employees working in many locations across the county in a wide variety of roles, from refuse collector to social worker, teacher and highway engineer.

A valued MHR customer since 1989, Powys migrated through successive HR and payroll solutions. Today it uses all iTrent modules, from core HR and Payroll to Absence, Learning, Development, Employee Self-Service and Web Recruitment.

Like most within the public sector, the Council faces the most challenging situation in years due to the current economic climate and consequent spending constraints, expected to worsen over the next few years.

Vision, Goals and Business Case

People Manager, Employee Self-Service, and business process re-engineering (BPR) were major work-streams of the council's People and Communications Strategy, forming part of the Corporate Improvement Plan.

SUMMARY

Organisational Objectives

- Reduce operating costs
- Improve employer brand

HR Objectives

- Reduce paper-based processes
- Effective resource management
- Drive strategic decision making

The Solution

MHR's iTrent Solution

- People Manager
- Employee Self Service

Key Results

- Initial projected savings of £408,500
- Total projected efficiency savings of £600,000
- Over 3,000 employees utilising online expenses
- Enhanced candidate experience via Web Recruitment
- Reduced paper consumption

Powys' people strategy is based on an increasingly shared vision: To move the HR and payroll functions' core focus towards the development of strategies that optimise the workforce and drive organisational performance.

The People Strategy Was Based on Four Key Goals

1. Understand existing workforce skills and capabilities; identify future skills required
2. Identify the most appropriate means of closing gaps between current and future capabilities
3. Create a consistent approach to workforce planning and development that ensures resources and people are used most effectively
4. Enable service managers to plan and develop resources in the most cost effective way, by providing tools and knowledge to make informed choices

Key Areas of Benefit Identified for Realising a Rapid Return on Investment

1. Improve service delivery by getting the right people into the right roles at the right time
2. Improve workforce flexibility through better understanding of skills and targeted training according to needs
3. Reduce operating costs through smarter ways of working, using streamlined processes and external skills where appropriate
4. Improve the perception of Powys as an employer of choice (employer brand)
5. Improve (more predictive) management information (MI) and tools to drive strategic decision making

As a core component of the People Strategy, the Business Process Review of Employment Processes project linked directly to the business goals and key benefits identified.

The overall aim was to significantly reduce paper-based legacy processes to realise cost benefits and improve data quality. People Manager and Employee Self-Service would be the main portal for all HR processes.

The Transactions and systems manager at Powys County Council explains: "To deliver more efficient methods of working, we began by completely reviewing employment processes and subsequent

re-engineering. Browser based access to People Manager and Employee Self-Service was a major project objective, and in addition to this we needed to realise efficiencies and improve the customer experience. It was recognised from the outset of the project that new processes would present a complete culture change for the council. In addition to providing administration efficiencies, we can now give managers the tools to facilitate them in managing their workforce. Employees now have portal access too, to manage their personal and employment data, and to initiate requests such as annual leave."

The Project Had Four Distinct Phases for Implementation

1. Employee Self-Service – update personal details, learning events, Learning and Development module
2. People Manager, stage one and updates to Employee Self-Service (e.g. absence booking, e-payslips, expenses)
3. People Manager, stage two – recruitment administration processes
4. People Manager, stage three – enhanced recruitment administration processes

With the chief executive, board of directors and councillors fully supporting and sponsoring the project, communication has been a vital component. Additionally, the change acceptance process (CAP) model was utilised, including:

- Early notification of changes and 'Watch this Space' adverts
- Articles and information on how changes will affect employees and managers
- Workshops for employees and managers
- Detailed training sessions
- Development of e-Learning module
- Ongoing support from online help and accessible support staff
- Service area representation
- Dedicated project team
- Project Board

Impact Achieved

The use of Employee Self-Service and People Manager has delivered automated efficiencies from input of information at source, reduced paper flow, increased accuracies and accountability and also consistency in application of policies and procedures.

Phase 1

“Employee Self-Service including learning events was the first project milestone. Initially, employees could access personal and employment data with the facility to search and book corporate learning events. Personal details such as home address and next of kin could also be updated allowing familiarisation with the new tool,” continues a spokesperson from Powys.

Employees can update their qualifications, book on to learning event waiting lists, and update their personal learning events. Their reporting manager then verifies changes via People Manager.

Phases 2 and 3

A key element of the second phase of the project was replacing the legacy, paper based processes and systems. For each of the following areas, processes were identified and potential savings calculated as key measures of success:

Expense Claims

Online expense claims have brought radical changes to the authorisation process. Employees now submit claims without receipts via Employee Self-Service. An automatic summary email is sent to their reporting manager. This is for information only; authorisation is not required due to capping and control reports, it is however possible to drill into the claim if necessary. The previous paper-based authorisation process caused a significant bottleneck for managers authorising claims and 90% were never challenged.

This new HMRC approved process is much faster and more efficient. Employees are made aware of

their responsibilities and all claims are subject to internal and external audit. Implemented controls and capping identifies rogue claims and ensures correct reimbursement, complying with policy irrespective of the amount entered.

Additionally, reports with details of all claims are automatically sent to budget holders after every payroll.

Annual Leave and Flexi Booking

Employees now request leave via Employee Self-Service which is authorised via People Manager. Further efficiencies were achieved by adopting a consistent annual leave calculation. Employees can access the corporate flexi system from Employee Self-Service, checking their flexi balance prior to making the request.

“As soon as a leave request is authorised, notification is emailed to the appropriate flexi system administrator to update, cutting down on this area’s exceptions. This element of the system has proved very popular with employees and managers, so much so that during feedback sessions, we had requests for all absences to be requested via Employee Self-Service. Hence, all paid and unpaid leave, including compassionate leave, JP Service etc., are now incorporated,” adds the transactions and systems manager.

Electronic Payslips

“Electronic payslips contain exactly the same information as paper payslips and are suitable evidence for proof of earnings for mortgage applications etc. Following the success of e-payslips, all employees currently receiving them



For employees to manage learning requests, we first had to implement Learning and Development. Previously we had several paper or spreadsheet based legacy systems for learning, maintained locally in the service areas. With no central records, if an employee moved to a different service area, their training record did not move with them. The introduction of Learning and Development has provided centralised, accurate employee records, which employees can access and update themselves.

will also receive an electronic P60. Full payslip history is available online.”

Online Pay Claims

Originally the perceived method was for all staff to claim via Self-Service. However, in May 2009 MHR launched a Rostering module. This module has enormous potential and enables the process of claiming to be even more streamlined than originally envisaged. Hence, this module has been utilised in Leisure Centres and will be utilised in other appropriate service areas throughout 2011 and 2012.

Establishment Variations and Pay and Conditions Variations

These replaced the legacy scheme of delegation and variation processes which involved slow and manual processes with a distinct lack of transparency and used numerous local systems for monitoring. There were significant areas of duplication in these processes and paperwork was often lost, resulting in overpayments and inaccurate Management Information.

The new processes are workflow driven with a clear audit trail and timescales built in.

Web Recruitment

The new web recruitment replaces the legacy recruitment site which was slow and unreliable, contributing to low applicant figures. Web recruitment is also now bi-lingual, allowing applicants to view all data in the medium of Welsh and submit electronic Welsh applications.

Recruitment Admin

The first stage of this includes the ability for managers to request to advertise, track the requisition, view applications and shortlist; all via iTrent's People Manager.

The second stage, phase four of the overall project, will realise more benefits and service user satisfaction with a more interactive approach, enabling managers to move applicants through the recruitment stages and schedule interviews. “The revised recruitment admin processes meet service needs by providing a transparent, electronic process, based on getting information input right the first time,” explains a spokesperson.

Groups of staff not included in some of the revised processes to date, and therefore excluded from benefit calculations, are operatives and hard to

reach employees such as domiciliary care workers, refuse, roadmen etc. We're currently investigating the potential for these staff groups, in conjunction with schools, to realise further benefits and increase the overall efficiency saving.

“All service areas with the exception of schools now request and authorise these changes via People Manager. Any changes received on paper are now returned to the initiator. Representing a complete culture change for the council, some managers have embraced the new system and its transparency because they recognise the benefits that it brings them, while a few still resist it as a perceived additional ‘admin’ task,” reports the transactions and systems manager.

“Measures of success for enabling service managers to plan and develop resources cost effectively, and the benefit of improved, more predictive MI and tools to drive strategic decision making, are more difficult to quantify. However, we're doing this via surveys and access to the People Manager tool. Currently we have rolled out People Manager to over 1,000 managers and routinely run audit reports to check that it is being accessed. Another measure of success identified was the uptake of online expenses to councillors where again we're on target with 25% of councillors submitting all claims online.”

Online surveys confirm that Web Recruitment has greatly enhanced applicants' experience of applying for positions with Powys, both internally and externally. This, along with a positive external evaluation, is a good measure of our key goal to improve perceptions of Powys as an employer of choice.

One particularly pleasing element for applicants is the system's ability to save an application mid-way and return at a later time. This allows applicants to complete their application over a number of days, rather than in one session.

The Future

Milestones to realise remaining goals and key benefits within the People Strategy have already been identified, including online appraisals and personal development plans.

Further benefits and increased overall efficiency savings will be realised when the revised processes are extended to cover employees and schools that are difficult to reach.