

Plymouth City Council is one of the largest unitary councils in the country, with a £208.237 million budget for 2010-11. It employs 12,000 people delivering all local authority services from education and social care to refuse collection for 260,000 people. In 2010, it was voted the nation's Best Achieving Council for the breadth of its improvement, the pride created in the historical naval city through its community leadership and inspirational creativity during difficult times.

Plymouth City Council's ICT department is leading the way in improving efficiency and resources in a local authority charged with making £30 million savings over three years.

Within a few months of fully implementing a new enterprise project management (EPM) system built on Microsoft Project Server technology, other departments with big budgets at the council are so impressed they are looking to follow that example.

The council is committed to protecting front line services from the effects of the public spending cuts. Instead, it is re-thinking its approach to how things are done, including reducing back office spending as part of a major modernisation programme to improve service delivery. As a result there was no increase in the council tax in 2011-12 for Plymouth residents.

This modernisation programme involves massive investment in IT across the council in order to realise its full potential. The ICT department is driving this programme and has to maximise return on the investment through smarter working, gaining better control of projects and having a single, clear and consistent view of all current and planned work.

Already using PRINCE2 as the method of running projects, the department knew it needed a better way of managing them, too, particularly on issues such as making the best use of resources. The Microsoft centralised EPM solution was chosen, with Program Framework selected as the provider:

“We had to have a better way of balancing and making the best use of our resources.”

explained Julie McDonagh, ICT Strategy and Programme Manager:

“We needed a single, clear view of what was happening across every area to help us to standardise and streamline our service.”

Envisioning workshops with senior management, team leaders, project managers and Program Framework identified a 'wish list' of key processes and benefits, from the features required and customising the solution to the council's specific needs to helping the 70+ users make the change.

Client testimonial

Introducing Project Server with the visioning from Program Framework has helped us realise process and practice improvement that we had been aspiring toward. This is not the end of the journey but definitely is a great inroad into having a robust project and programme governance with much improved visibility.”

Julie McDonagh

ICT Strategy and Programme Manager,
Plymouth City Council



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The department wanted a collaborative system that defined, scheduled and assigned genuine resources throughout the lifecycle of a project, offered a consistent timesheet and tracking process and showed real time information on cost and progress, giving the ability to prioritise projects and re-plan or re-schedule activities in order to meet agreed objectives. This in turn would lead to better governance.

In addition, clear reporting was required presented in a form appropriate to those who needed to view it, from detailed information for those running the projects to project highlight reports for senior management.

As part of the package, Program Framework also ran train the trainer sessions with key team members, who then cascaded it down to the wider team.

“We had to improve our ability to deliver on our promises to our customers - other departments within the council – and ultimately to the elected members,” said Julie. **“Project Server is helping us to do this. We are managing projects so much better and have already gained tremendous benefit.”**

“It helps us to manage accessibility as well as capacity so that we can estimate and use resources more effectively and forecast demand more accurately. Now we are getting into our stride, we are seeing spin-off benefits with Project Server, such as improving benefit and risk management.”

“We have totally changed our thinking. It’s been a catalyst and our confidence can only become stronger and stronger. We are now looking to expand and grow our implementation to a wider portfolio management basis.”

Julie McDonagh

ICT Strategy and Programme Manager,
Plymouth City Council



Technology

The solution is built on a Microsoft technology platform and includes Microsoft SQL Server, Project Server, and SharePoint.

This combination of technologies provides users with the ability to collaborate effectively, and gives management the control and visibility they require to make effective decisions. We coupled this with our pre-configured solution, Project Server Framework™ providing a base platform of configuration, and reporting in a highly cost effective, off the shelf package.

Users access the solution through either Microsoft Project Professional, or Internet Explorer. Both of these technologies provide familiar, easy to use interfaces that users can readily adopt. In delivering all its solutions, one of Program Framework’s key endeavours is to minimise the impact on users allowing for rapid uptake, providing quick return on investment.



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