



Sunderland City Council is responsible for more than 700 services including health and social care, planning, leisure facilities and education. It works with the other four councils in Tyne and Wear through joint authorities to provide Police, Fire and Rescue, emergency planning and transport services. Sunderland City Council currently has 13,747 employees and serves a population of 280,300. It budgeted to spend £784 million in the financial year 2010-11.

In common with all local authorities, Sunderland City Council is publicly accountable for every penny it spends. It has to be seen to be delivering value to the people it serves – a task made even more imperative in a climate of spending cuts and restraints.

The council is committed to delivering value for local people. Its 2010-11 budget saw the lowest percentage council tax increase in more than a decade, achieved through efficiency savings of £7.7 million. The council consistently has the lowest council tax in the North East and is continually focused on finding innovative and more efficient ways of providing quality services at the least cost.

This ethos runs throughout the authority and includes transforming the way that both new and existing projects are delivered by improving processes. The ICT department is leading the way.

“ We had a reasonably mature project delivery process, but there was a lack of visibility of resources, There is a massive call on resources and we needed a solution to address this issue, allowing us to improve our performance and delivery and move to the next maturity level. ”

Barry Larvin

Sunderland City Council

The department's customers are other directorates within the council, which in turn impact on Sunderland's residents. The team was already using Microsoft Project as a standalone, desktop tool. What was required was something that offered effective resource management with improved visibility and control, real-time reporting and enhanced collaboration and communication – all to a tight budget.

If it proved successful, it would progress across all departments.

The answer was a high impact, end-to-end enterprise project management (EPM) solution. Following a presentation from Microsoft on its Project Server solution, it was agreed to adopt this system with help from a specialist implementation partner.

Program Framework was selected after the authority's rigorous tender process, including gathering evidence from other local government clients. Head of client services, James Butler and lead consultant Andrew Dover worked closely with Sunderland City Council to establish what was required, gather the data to populate the system and identify staff training needs to ensure maximum benefit.

Client testimonial

From our initial engagement Program Framework worked with us to help us firm up and document our requirements and processes. They offered valuable insight into the best practice usage of the system and how we might best utilise it whilst following Sunderland specific processes. Their support and assistance acting as a critical friend during the implementation process has helped us develop a robust system that has been quickly and easily embedded into our everyday work.

Barry Larvin

Quality and Process Manager
Sunderland City Council



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“ The council already had good project management processes and users were familiar with Microsoft Project. They also had a strong project manager for the EPM deployment and the sponsor – Tom Baker, head of ICT – was involved and took a keen interest. This helped to achieve a very smooth implementation, ”

James Butler

Program Framework

An envisioning process included detailing the vision and aspirations for the new approach, covering resourcing, governance, reporting and ease of use. The council also wanted to capture best practice as a tool to further improve project processes.

The main issues identified with the existing processes were poor access to information, lack of consistency, scope creep, limited enforcement of the processes, lack of accountability and capacity management, the use of multiple solutions and a lack of communication.

Microsoft Project Server, tailored to meet the council's specific needs, was able to address these issues by offering stronger project governance, improved prioritisation, centralised document storage, a better approval process and improved resource management, together with greater visibility of all projects and programmes for all involved, including stakeholders.

It was not just about new technology. Introducing it would also involve a cultural change for users. Program Framework took a 'train the trainer' approach to embed the new processes and to ensure that all 120 users fully understood and were comfortable with using the EPM solution, whilst minimising the cost to the council.

“ We have changed the way we do projects. Everyone has been able to see that it is a positive step forward by standardising and streamlining the way we work and how we expect our project managers to run projects. As a council, we have to do more with less and I am confident that we will see time and cost-saving benefits, together with an overall improvement in project delivery. ”

Barry Larvin

Sunderland City Council

Within a few months of the system going live, other departments were already keen to follow ICT's example.

“ The solution has been designed to be flexible and support the council's aspirations to roll it out across the council, ensuring that all departments can benefit from efficiency improvements. ”

James Butler

Program Framework

Technology

The solution is built on a Microsoft technology platform and includes Microsoft SQL Server 2008, Project Server 2007 and SharePoint 2007. 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.

Users access the solution through either Microsoft Project Professional, in the case of project managers, or Internet Explorer, in the case of all other users. 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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