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power to you



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Hartlepool Borough Council is one of the UK's best performing local authorities, assessed as a four-star council by the Audit Commission – the highest possible – for seven years in succession.

Located on the coast of Teesside in County Durham, the Council is the largest employer in the area, providing a range of services to just under 100,000 people.

In common with many local authorities, Hartlepool is constantly seeking new ways to make its shrinking budgets stretch further, to achieve more with less.

With this in mind, it launched a Business Transformation Programme, which merged a number of departments and brought in new ways of working. As a result the workloads of service directors and managers increased and the Council realised that key members of staff would require additional support if the transformation was to succeed.

Nicola Bailey, Service Director for Child and Adult Services saw a leap in demands on her time as a result of the changes. She regularly worked after normal office hours – both in the office and at home because it was difficult to keep on top of her emails and calendar during the day when faced with many other demands on her time.

Her experience was shared by Denise Ogden, Assistant Director for Neighbourhood Services. She says: “Workloads increased because of the council programme and a request from central government for greater performance reporting.”

The Council looked at using BlackBerry™ devices, so that directors and managers could respond to emails and manage their calendars while on the move. However, this created a problem.

Small in-house team

Hartlepool Borough Council outsourced IT and only retained a small team in-house, primarily to manage its outsourcing contracts. It would be impossible for the team to complete its day-to-day tasks and oversee a large BlackBerry estate without the council paying to expand the team.

John Bulman, ICT Contract Manager at Hartlepool Borough Council, recalls: "This was expensive and something we wanted to avoid. We needed an expert that could manage the whole thing and enable us to focus on the council's IT strategy."

John started looking for the right organisation to manage a BlackBerry estate and help him avoid the cost of a bigger ICT team.

He was hoping to identify a complete service to assist him in rolling out the devices, keeping the system up and running, and providing support when needed. "I wanted to work with an organisation that lived and breathed BlackBerry," he says.

Hosting and management services

He found what he was looking for by outsourcing BlackBerry to Vodafone. "I knew Vodafone offered BlackBerry, but I didn't know it provided both hosting and management services," he says.

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The Council successfully rolled out BlackBerry to service directors and top-level managers. John and his colleagues took part in a training programme, arranged by Vodafone, to help employees to make the most of the device's features.

However, their involvement in their BlackBerry estate ended there and Vodafone did the rest, enabling the IT team to get back to working on the council's IT strategy, particularly for home and remote working.

Nicola, Denise and their colleagues now check emails and update calendars throughout the day using BlackBerry. They make the most of their time while walking between council buildings or waiting for a meeting to begin by checking their inboxes. They also spend less time phoning their personal assistants during the day asking them to check their inboxes to see if an email has arrived or whether they have time for a meeting on a particular date.

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John Bulman, ICT Contract Manager,
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Greater control

The Council's Business Transformation Programme is achieving success, thanks in part to the roll out of BlackBerrys to key staff. Service directors and senior managers can coordinate their increased workloads more efficiently with BlackBerry, while senior executives such as Denise Ogden now have the technology to assist them in balancing their priorities and providing a responsive service.

She says: “The BlackBerry allows me to deal with emails as they arrive, enabling me to take action quicker.” In the past, some messages were left unread for hours, but now council staff tackle the majority of their correspondence within an hour.

“We've really sharpened up our internal communications,” says John. “The flow of communication is a lot faster and things are done more quickly. BlackBerry has certainly increased efficiency.”

Executives such as Nicola and Denise have a greater degree of control and make much better use of the time they have. John says: “Our staff are worth a lot to the council. The last thing we wanted was for them to work more hours than necessary, when there's a solution out there that can help them.”

Fast access to Council data

The Council delivers better services to residents due to the transformation programme, which has been successful in part because senior staff can manage their increased workloads. It has also been able to improve services while closing two administrative buildings at the same time. “We're cutting back on our property portfolio and saving resources,” says John.

The ICT team has avoided the cost of developing in-house expertise to manage the BlackBerry estate. Instead, it can provide council employees with a high-performing service using Vodafone. John also knows that time won't be lost if a BlackBerry fails or is stolen, because Vodafone will get on to the problem fast. “I have a lot of confidence in Vodafone, and the service has been excellent,” he says.

Employees will see further efficiencies in the future when the council runs central applications on the BlackBerry devices. “We're planning the next phase of development,” says John. “Employees will get fast access to council data as they move around, helping them to work more effectively.”

Significant benefits

- Increased productivity as senior directors and managers respond to emails faster and can get more done in normal office hours
- Improved services to citizens due to a successful transformation programme, made possible by improved communications and widespread efficiencies
- Administrative buildings have been closed as council employees operate more efficiently while on the move, freeing up resources for council services
- Increased cost effectiveness as the IT team has avoided the cost of developing in-house expertise to manage the BlackBerry estate
- Greater flexibility with employees soon able to work even more effectively when the council runs central applications on BlackBerry devices
- Better work/life balance for employees who have a greater degree of control over their time and make much better use of it

