

“We are committed to providing customer excellence and the RB Performance PMQA system will only enhance this.”

Jayne Henderson

Head of Revenues & Benefits

Newcastle City Council

BACKGROUND

Located in North East England, on the north bank of the river Tyne the City of Newcastle is a mix of the modern and historic with a population of 272,000. This translates in revenues and benefits terms to –

- Some 35,500 people on benefit and rising - attracting in excess of £125m in benefits subsidy;
- A council tax base of over 122,335 domestic properties with a net collectable debit of £83.1m;
- A non-domestic tax base of 9,400 equating with a net collectable debit of £119.4m.

THE CHANGE PROGRAMME

The Division within the City Council responsible for Revenues & Benefits, Exchequer, Customer Services and ICT is the 'City Service,' which has overseen a significant change and investment programme of £20m over the past 4 years.

- In 2003/2004 the Revenues and Benefits teams were re-located into one central location to form a “back office” operation that brought the two teams together. For Benefit staff this was a significant change to the way they were used to working as they had been based in 21 Neighborhood Offices throughout the City providing frontline and back offices services within each of the locations.

- In 2005 the City Service implemented new core applications for revenues and benefits including document management and began to align service delivery with, leading edge customer resource management and call centre systems.
- City Service now provides front line services in six customer service centres and one contact centre.

COMMITMENT TO CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Throughout the change programme City Service has challenged the 'status quo,' embraced new ways of working and fundamentally redesigned the services provided.

To further improve value for money for taxpayers City Service has embarked upon a SMARTER working programme that will introduce homeworking, mobile working and relocate the back office from leased accommodation into a Council owned building saving a further £1 million per year.

HOMEWORKING

City Service has launched and promoted the concept of homeworking and it seems likely, due to the high number of initial applications from staff, that most of the back office processing will be carried out by home workers. This will not only reduce the cost and size of accommodation required but will increase productivity of the team - early indications show that home working increases productivity by some 50% over that of office based members of staff.



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Homeworking is one of the major reasons why City Service chose the RB Performance Management and Quality Assurance (PMQA) system.

HOW PMQA WILL HELP US

Jayne Henderson, Head of Revenues and Benefits said that

“Other systems we considered were not flexible and could not be as easily tailored to our requirements as the RB Performance System. They were also very expensive and did not offer good value for money. Historically we have had minimal performance management information available in designing our services and we have not managed individual performance in a robust way.

In 2008 we carried out a manual exercise to map out areas that we wanted to measure and we have used this information, so far, to measure individual performance and make changes to the way in which we deliver our services.

The RB Performance PMQA will enable us to further enhance our ability to measure and manage performance. It automates the data collection process and we are able to use it in all aspects of benefits administration including processing, overpayments, appeals and quality assurance and in administering council tax and non-domestic rates billing, collection and recovery.

Although we already had a robust risk based quality assurance culture and system, the RB Performance solution enhances this and assists us in bringing together all information to form a full picture of Individual performance i.e. quality and quantity and it help us manage issues such as serial / compulsive ‘pending’, ‘no action’ and ‘defective’ processes.

Importantly we also use the system to identify training requirements and support staff in learning and developing as well as setting individual and team targets that we constantly monitor. Ultimately when all else fails we use information from RB Performance to manage poor performance.

The PMQA system assists us in identifying work patterns during the year and we plan resources around it. Some of the peaks and troughs identified during the year came as a surprise and were unexpected, but now we have accurate information we are able to forward plan and use our resources smartly to manage those periods. We are also starting to look at the higher level information which will assist us in planning our overall resources and investment required to help the services improve.

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