

SUCCESS STORY

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL

Delivering annual cost
savings and service
improvements



A partnership that has seen continual service improvement and is underpinned by an ICT service in line with strategic business requirements.

Challenge summary

In 2009 Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council (WHBC) sought a partner to help it deliver its overriding objectives of achieving significant cost reduction without any reduction in service quality.

Key points

- Centre of excellence for revenues and benefits, ICT and customer service
- Consistent performance despite significant increases in work load and correspondence
- Annual cost savings of £500,000 per year
- Creating a hub for shared service delivery

The challenge

When you are already a strong performing council, the challenge is not only to maintain your high standards of citizen service and efficiency, but to find new ways of improving on a successful business model. Despite a good record of customer satisfaction, WHBC, like all UK local authorities, had to address a number of performance and budgetary issues.

The council sought a partner to help it resolve these issues in three areas of service delivery: revenues and benefits administration, ICT service provision and customer services (contact centre, reception, switchboard).

Against strong competition Sopra Steria was awarded the 12-year contract, which subsequently has been extended until 2022. It has developed into a true business partnership. Strong working relationships are underpinned by a risk-and-reward business model that ensures WHBC maintains and extends its good reputation for service excellence.

Our solution

Sopra Steria has improved the quality and efficiency of the council's service delivery in the following areas:

ICT services: Sopra Steria supports WHBC's infrastructure and applications, including core printing, service desk, remote monitoring and consulting.

Customer services: Sopra Steria manages 200,000 calls per year through the switchboard and over 86,000 via the contact centre, and receives 25,000 visitors at the reception.

Revenues and benefits: Sopra Steria provides housing benefit and council tax support, council tax and national non-domestic rates (NNDR) administration and collection

Service transformation: new customer contact technologies and process change have enabled employees and improved citizen access to services.

Shared services: the solution includes the potential for other councils to use the service as a hub for shared services.

Mobile working: tablet solutions for officers including: environmental health, environmental services, building control and council tax.

How we worked together

A highly consultative approach to solution development quickly established a high level of trust between WHBC and Sopra Steria. The commitment and involvement of staff has been a major factor in the success of the partnership:

- **ICT services:** continual improvement has seen an increase in the level of first time fixes from 40 to 150 calls per month. 90 servers are now running in a virtualised environment, delivering 21% power savings, equating to a 40-tonne CO2 reduction.
- **Customer services:** process redesign has enabled more services to move into the contact centre, freeing up professional staff to focus on strategic projects. Revenues and benefits and parking calls are handled alongside enquiries for waste collection, litter, pest control and council tax.
- **Revenues and benefits:** despite legislative changes and a dramatic increase in volumes there has been consistent improvement in speed of processing KPIs, which outperform neighbouring authorities.
- **Service transformation:** new automated call distribution and CRM technology has improved service levels. Web-enabled services are making it easier for citizens to submit applications.
- **Shared services:** In 2016 Broxbourne Borough Council joined the Hertfordshire Shared Service for Revenues and Benefits and ICT services.
- **Mobile working:** officers can submit reports and access information via tablet devices, which means they can spend more time in the field and take less time travelling to and from the office.

Results and benefits

Sopra Steria is delivering annual cost savings of £500,000 for WHBC. Despite a dramatic increase in volumes there has been consistent improvement in speed of processing KPIs for WHBC, with the Revenues and Benefits service being one of the highest performing in Hertfordshire. Our 2014/15 performance figures indicate:

- Housing Benefit new claims were calculated more quickly than any other Hertfordshire authority
- Over the last 4 years WHBC claimants have experienced an 11% improvement in the average time to process changes in their Housing Benefits.
- NDR (Business rates) collection rate for WHBC was 99.15%, 1% above national average for same period
- Council Tax collection rate for WHBC was 98.04%, with the national average for same period at 97% the average time to process changes in benefits

Digital technology is being used to support customer service transformation:

- Web enabled services through e-forms and self service are making it easier for citizens to submit applications to the council
- Business process and technology innovation to empower employees, deliver customer centric services and make efficiency savings.

“ Sopra Steria has continued to deliver service improvement to maintain our position as one of the top performing authorities in Hertfordshire. Their flexible approach means the customer facing services they deliver underpinned by ICT can be adapted to meet changing customer requirements. ”

Chief Executive,
Welwyn Hatfield
Borough Council

“ In the time I have worked with Sopra Steria they have delivered a professional service that has exceeded my expectations. They undertook an initial exercise to deliver an outline business case at their own risk which provided the basis for our decision to proceed. They continue to meet their commitments and I look forward to developing our relationship further. ”

Sandra Beck, Director
Finance and Resources,
Broxbourne Borough
Council



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