



Northgate Case Study

Birmingham City Council

Housing Implementation Case Study

In November 2002, Northgate signed a £5 million contract to provide a housing management software solution for Birmingham City Council. This was a landmark win for Northgate in the housing sector, as with a housing stock of 80,000 properties, Birmingham represents the largest social housing provider in England.

The contract formed part of Birmingham City Council's broader £10 million project named Housing Information Technology Solution (HITS), initiated to drive devolution and enable focus to be placed squarely upon the neighbourhood.

The solution provides Birmingham City Council with an integrated online information system, enabling the council to offer more choice and a faster service to its customers. The solution has also been designed to enable Birmingham City Council to gain access to internal reporting information instantaneously to drive efficiency improvements.

Before adopting the Northgate software, Birmingham City Council used an in-house solution that had grown organically for over 18 years. The costs associated with the required upgrades and maintenance were becoming unfeasible, which alongside the new demands that the neighbourhood focus were creating, prompted Birmingham to acquire the market-leading replacement system.

The implementation model was almost unique in the sector, both in its scale and the method of deployment. The intricate nature of the in-house solution and of Northgate Housing dictated that the approach be one of single-delivery. This involved each major area of the housing business being implemented simultaneously.

This included a total of eight application modules from the Northgate Housing suite. Northgate worked in partnership with Birmingham City Council personnel on the Implementation and support of these standard Housing core modules and on the development of bespoke software and interfaces as per BCC's requirements definition.

The project timetable was set at a little over two years with a single delivery go-live date of January 2005. The go-live was successfully achieved due in no little part to the commitment of all parties to securing this outcome. Indeed there was a range of lessons learnt and/or critical success factors reinforced.

These included: The success of the project was in large part due to the active involvement of the business throughout the project. It is important that implementation is not seen simply as an IT project.

Birmingham included a series of Conference Room Pilots within the project. While this approach will not suit all organisations, it does provide a very useful vehicle for both engaging with the business beyond the project team and assessing progress to date.

Management of expectations is critical in ensuring a successful project is seen as such.

The scale of the implementation was such that training logistics were a project in their own right. Birmingham City Council recognised this early on and employed a specialist third party to reduce the risks associated with such a large programme.



Formal project procedures were employed at all stages of the Birmingham project. The level of procedural control would only be applicable to the largest and most complex projects. However, flowing from this, close control of project scope was a major contributor to on-time delivery.

Birmingham and Northgate together took a long hard look at product enhancements and developed a phased delivery plan that minimised the risks of any development delays impacting on the project.



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It is important that early analysis of application output requirements (letters and reports) is carried out and the associated work included in the project plan. This can be a substantial piece of work in its own right.

Effective decision-making processes are vital, at all levels of the project structure. Wherever possible, decision-making capability should be devolved to as low a level in the structure as possible.

It is essential that people assigned to project roles have the necessary skills and knowledge to undertake their assignment. Equally, consistency of personnel, from all involved organisations, is important to the successful achievement of the project timetable and goals.

Management of change within the organisation must accommodate the impact of the new application and business processes.

Post go-live, Northgate has been providing support services under a comprehensive Service Level Agreement. Despite the formal agreement, Northgate has continued to demonstrate a flexible approach to meeting the support needs of the City Council. Indeed flexibility in service provision is a key component of the Northgate ethos.

This contract strengthens Northgate's leading position within the housing software market. Northgate is a major supplier of housing business solutions to Local Authorities, Registered Social Landlords and housing providers. More than 90 social housing providers in the UK and worldwide are already successfully using Northgate Housing, and over a million Local Authority and Housing Association properties are now managed using this software. Northgate believes that this success has been achieved by working closely with housing agencies, applying insight into government legislation, flexibility and its innovative Northgate Housing products.

Find out more

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About Northgate Information Solutions

Northgate Information Solutions plc is the UK's leading supplier of specialist software and IT services for the human resources and public services markets. The Group has three major divisions - Northgate Public Services, Northgate HR and Northgate Managed Services - each with market-leading positions.

With 25 major UK offices, the Group employs approximately 3,300 staff and has more than 2,700 large/medium customers and in excess of 5,000 small/medium customers in the UK and Ireland. Northgate works with 80% of UK local authorities, all UK police forces and is increasing its presence in the education market.

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