

Wandsworth Borough Council

Company description

Wandsworth Borough Council in London is made up of 60 elected members representing 20 wards, and members are elected every four years. It claims a record 27 Charter Mark quality awards across all council departments including: education, leisure and amenity services, social services and housing.

Sector

Public Sector

Product

Empower Personnel

Challenge

With the Council's mainframe contract due to end, a challenge was set to select and implement an HR solution that was compatible with its preferred IT platform – Windows NT.

Solution

EmpowerHR will allow the strategic use of HR information by the Council.

Wandsworth Borough Council was faced with the task of finding an HR solution that would combine ease of use with their preferred platform. EmpowerHR was chosen as the solution that would allow the council to make the most strategic use of their HR information.

Background

In December 1997, Wandsworth Borough Council decided to find an alternative solution that was compatible with the Council's preferred IT platform - Windows NT. Its decision would affect the Council's seven departments; each with their own devolved responsibilities, personnel functions and differing requirements.

A 'user requirement specification document', based on extensive consultations with the users, outlined exactly what would be required of their new HR system. It included the following key points:

- The platform must be Windows NT with a Microsoft SQL Server database
- The system must be able to store vast amounts of data with absolute security
- It must be structured for seven departments
- It must allow customisation to the Wandsworth Borough Council's precise requirements
- It must be competitively priced
- It must be able to be implemented by September 1998

Five HR solution providers were then invited to respond to the document.

NorthgateArinso impressed the council as Tony Rumph, principal personnel officer, explains:

"From our first meeting they demonstrated a good understanding of the uniqueness of the public sector and a preparedness to incorporate our very specific requirements into their standard system."

Carol Miller, senior personnel officer, agrees: "What we were most interested in was whether the systems could be customised sufficiently to meet our specific needs."

Typical of this was the fact that HR systems had been designed to assign a job to an employee, as is customary in private companies. In the public sector, however, an employee is assigned to a post. The ability of a system to create employee career history and to record changes to a post was an important requirement.

Complicating matters further, conditions of service attributed to individual posts often change when Councils submit competitive tenders. These changes must be recognised by the HR system and tracked over time.

Benefits

- Easy to extract information and create ad hoc reports.
- Can track specific reasons for employee absence, group them into general categories, then produce comprehensive absence reports.
- Allows individual users to create their own queries and reports.

Solution

"NorthgateArinso appeared to understand our organisational structure and requirements," added Rumph.



"What our customer said"

"It's just so easy to extract information and create ad hoc reports with Empower Personnel we really feel as if we own the system"

**Senior Personnel Officer
Wandsworth Borough Council**

Empower Personnel also provided a practical solution for two other areas.

The first was its ability to provide, following some customisation, ready access to strategic information regarding sickness and absence. Empower Personnel was able to track specific reasons for employee absence, such as 'back pain', and group them into general categories, such as 'muscle related'. Comprehensive absence reports could then be produced for any individual in any department within the organisation.

The second area of key importance was in general reporting. They needed a system with a great deal of flexibility, which allowed individual users to create their own queries and reports.

As Rumph explained: "We were looking for a system that could provide strategic information on any slice of our organisation, whether it be for posts, employees or both, within a department or across the whole Council."

In January 1998 it was agreed that Empower Personnel offered the best solution to meet the Council's needs, once the standard system had been customised to their requirements. A Key User Group (KUG), with representatives from every department, was formed to work closely with the project team to develop a 'customisation specification document'.

"It was essential to have input and involvement from every department," said Rumph. "We didn't want to implement a system and then have someone complain that it didn't meet their needs."

With the customisation specifications agreed, the project team put together a detailed timetable for their completion and implementation. Continued effort from all involved led to the customisation being completed in record time.

"This was extremely important, because if we had been forced to renegotiate an extended period for the outsourced mainframe service we were using it would have been at a considerable cost to the Council," said Miller.

Next began the process of converting all the data from the old mainframe and adapting it to meet the expanded fields in the new system. Once the data had been transferred, full training was given in the use of the new system before carrying out a detailed testing program of the system's functionality and the data transfer process. The system went live in August 1998.

Miller explains how well the system has worked. "It's just so easy to extract information and create ad hoc reports." She continued, "Where the mainframe system relied on trained programming staff to effect changes and generate reports on our behalf, with Empower Personnel we really feel as if we own the system."

Conclusion

With the tools now in place, Wandsworth Borough Council is looking at ways of developing the use of its HR information more strategically to improve the organisation as a whole.

According to Rumph, "We're now looking at ways of giving our line managers direct access to the system. This will give them instant access to essential information about their own employees without having to rely on their own personnel sections to provide the information on their behalf. "That can only lead to more effective management and ultimately increased productivity," he added.

For more information

With the skills, experience and market knowledge of NorthgateArinso behind you, you too can be well placed to translate the HR challenges your organisation is facing into powerful opportunities.

For an initial discussion about your requirements, call us on 0800 035 0545.
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