

Cheshire West and Chester

All Change!

The authority of Cheshire West and Chester (CWaC) supports a population of 327,500, making it the fourth largest unitary authority in the North-West. It is bounded by Cheshire East on the east and by the Welsh border on the west, to the north by the Mersey Valley, and to the south by Shropshire. It includes the historic town of Chester and industrial towns like Ellesmere Port. CWaC was established on 1st April 2009 as part of structural changes to local government, along with its sister authority Cheshire East. During the transition period of change the new Council located £3m of possible efficiencies in its 09-10 budget.



The Smart Way to Transformation

The ContrOCC implementation project sits within a programme for building on delivery of local government reorganisation. As part of the 2011 vision for the next phase of organisational change, we wanted to amalgamate a range of Social Care case management systems and databases into a single reporting and management structure. Adults' and Children's Services sought one solution to transform the data landscape and migrate existing data. This comprised a wide range of data and functionality areas including occupational therapy, blue badges, independent reviews, adoptions and safeguarding. Systems integration was required with Oracle, Lagan, CareNotes and the electronic service portal.

A review of the council's legacy system, PARIS, was undertaken and a new set of criteria were chosen for the Children's Services placement system. The tendering process was undertaken in July 2010. Of the initial 14 suppliers, a shortlist of 6 were chosen and of those 6, 3 were selected to demonstrate their product. In early December 2010, Liquidlogic's ICS and OCC's ContrOCC were the chosen solution.

Filling in the Gaps

While the core requirements for a replacement system were clear, some of the gaps and potential benefits only became apparent as the project kicked off. We were aware that the existing system had gaps in reporting, but some reporting requirements have only become clear throughout the lifetime of the project. More crucially, as we started to analyse the existing finance data to prepare for migration, it became clear that data quality and reliability in the legacy system were insufficient to meet the ambitions of the new council.

Developing Strategies

Our data migration lead at CWaC made several attempts to organise existing finance data into a form that could be coherently migrated into ContrOCC. One of the challenges was to break away from the long ingrained standards and cultures surrounding our legacy system, and to lift those constraints to make migration of data possible. Between December 2010 and January 2011, our relationship with OCC and understanding of ContrOCC grew, alongside OCC's insight into CWaC's needs. Both sides were realising that the trajectory towards a successful migration and setup of data in ContrOCC was no longer clear, nor would the finance data be ready to migrate in a timely or coherent fashion. In early February 2011, the ContrOCC Implementation Manager made a radical proposal to abandon the data migration attempts made so far, and to enter manually contracts, services and finance care packages.

This proposal had three main benefits:

- The right data made it to the right area; minor errors in legacy data could be corrected "on the spot" without requiring a full migration cycle.
- CWaC users would become experts in ContrOCC through the process of entering the data thus creating a small core of proficient "superusers".
- We would have a "live" version of its finance database to test and familiarise ourselves with in the run up to go-live.

Tidying up the Data

Once the decision was made to proceed with a manual data load, Chrissie Hayes gathered the resources and led the CWaC team. The process of manual entry took place under tight constraints; we were in the "pressure cooker" phase of User Acceptance Testing (UAT) and needed to move towards a synchronised ContrOCC / ICS environment to test it as soon as possible. We had only five days available to complete the manual load of the entire functional ContrOCC database as this was coupled with the requirement to continue with "business as usual" across Children's Services. Our ContrOCC Implementation Manager managed the manual input task, sharing out data entry and configuration tasks whilst maintaining and coordinating the database to ensure that the highest possible data accuracy was maintained during the week's data migration. After five days of frantic work, we had arrived at a state where we had a core of superusers who were trained and confident in the use of ContrOCC; our data was ready to enable parallel running against our legacy system; and we had the ability to perform end-to-end testing on the new platform.

Overcoming Challenges

During the review stage, it became obvious that some of the payments and payment types were either no longer appropriate or had not been recently reviewed. CWaC undertook to correct these, alongside periods of strenuous monitoring of the critical pre-go-live maintenance process. Other challenges related to the creation of new interfaces from the finance system to Oracle R12 (also recently upgraded within the council). Testing of these interfaces proved challenging. However, because we had an effectively "live" database, we were able to complete rigorous testing. When the Protocol & ContrOCC ICS went live at CWaC in June 2011, the ContrOCC data was loaded manually and all other live data in the wider ICS context was migrated, integrated and synchronised with ContrOCC.



ContrOCC leads the way

During the implementation, we learned that some of our old cultures and practices around data management did not fully support the project in terms of the pace and energy that were being invested into it. ContrOCC helped to drive a culture shift towards greater business ownership of data and systems. The whole project has been predicated upon Children's Services managing, owning and administering its own data; IT functions have been to support the service in that ownership, as a partner led by the Children's Service. This is a radically different approach, the first such in this Council; from this project the organisational learning is already starting to spread to other areas within the Council.

In June 2011, the first live export of data was undertaken. With our knowledge and experience of the new system, we were able to start to identify further requirements to our payment types and systems. ContrOCC has already created efficiency savings to the local authority. For example, there are no longer regular requirements to pay variations to foster carers by cheque every month. We are now live with Special Guardianship Orders, Residence Orders, Care Leavers and In House Fostering; Direct Payments and Agency Fostering placements are in final configuration and due to be in operation by October. We are examining internal charging for residential and other specialist care. Bringing agency payments online through ContrOCC will again reduce demands on operational resources and increase savings.

The End Result

ContrOCC is a product that empowers us to review and amend our data to fit our business needs, rather than changing our business processes to fit the restrictions of our data. Our pay runs are now regular and on time; the ability to spot and correct errors and intervene to adjust payments before they go out is now one person's work for a morning, instead of five people's work for four days. Our data quality has significantly and measurably improved, and process-integrated checking ensures that it will remain at this high level of reliability rather than degrading over time. Staff are motivated and engaged with the new system, working "with" rather than "despite" it. We estimate that savings due to use of ContrOCC are in the region of £68k across the first financial year. In short, ContrOCC has provided us with a financial solution across the whole spectrum of Children's Services needs.

Jon Goldie, ICS & Projects
Cheshire West and Chester Council

Quotes

"We really like ContrOCC and it has saved us cash both in terms of actual payments and in terms of staff efficiencies. One of the main benefits is that now we 'own' all our data and have an intimate understanding of it, we can develop the reporting and use of the system into the future."

Jon Goldie,
Project Manager, CWaC

"ContrOCC has vastly simplified our payments administration and empowered CWaC to take control of our payments processing. It has revolutionised our view of payments made to providers of care for children and our forecasting of future payment levels."

Alan Shaw,
Strategic Support Children's & Young People's Services, CWaC

"Social workers need to be freed from the burden of paperwork and computers to spend time with the children who need their support most. That's what this project has been about."

Jon Goldie,
Project Manager, CWaC

"Implementing Children's Finance at CWaC was a real challenge but with the support of Liquidlogic and OCC and the dedication of a number of key people at CWaC we made it happen and delivered real benefits to Children's Services."

Helen Walter,
Implementation Manager, OCC

"I'm really proud both of our solution to ICS finance (ContrOCC) and of the service that we provide in helping local authorities to adopt it. It makes the effort all worthwhile to see organisations such as CWaC be able to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the work they do because of the software we help them implement."

Nick Warner,
Local Government Product Director, OCC

For further information on this case study or details of OCC's LG Products and services please contact:

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