



Automating Contract based Commissioning, Payments and Performance Assessment

Jamie Hewitt, Business Information Manager at Thurrock Council explains how Thurrock Council are achieving their vision for streamlining their Contracts, Commissioning, Payments and Performance Assessment and how their new IT system will continue to add value in the future.

Thurrock Council is a unitary authority on the North Eastern edge of London, with a fast-growing population that currently stands at approx 143,000. In 2005-06, our Social Care Department provided services as part of an assessed care package to approx 3500 clients and we are proud to have been awarded 3 stars by the Commission for Social Care inspection in 2005.

We embarked upon this project about eighteen months ago. We had a couple of systems that were nearing the end of their lifecycle and so, as part of our continued drive to improve services to our residents and clients, we undertook a project to take a holistic view of how we managed information flows and recording systems across the whole of Social Care. This included Contracts, Commissioning, Finance and Performance Management.

Unsurprisingly we found that:

- Information was held in many different forms and places – paper systems, card systems, Excel files, Access databases, word documents etc.
- Information was often duplicated, could not be easily tied together and in some cases was incomplete.



Because of this, lots of work was required to compile accurate statistics and complete statutory returns. It also highlighted that our paper processes for commitments, commissioning and other areas were weak and slow.

This in-depth look at the way we worked made us realise that this was an area where we could continue to improve service to our clients, whilst improving on value for money and efficiency. We therefore decided to get a single system in place to manage the whole of the information within this area. We needed business systems that would reduce our administration time and costs and allow us to further improve services to our clients.

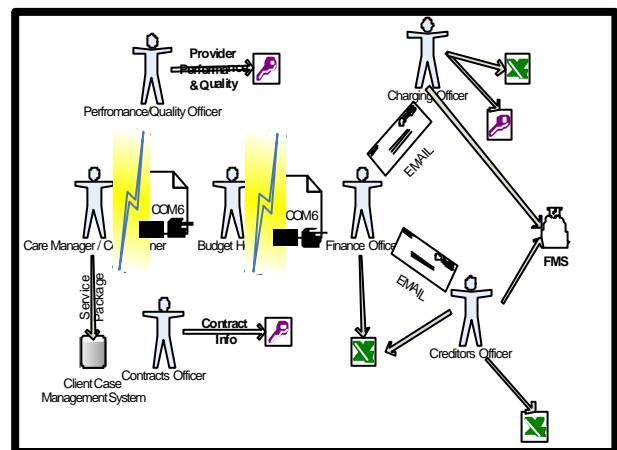


Fig 1: Our Starting Point

Our vision was to have a set of fully integrated user-friendly IT systems that would hold all of our contracts, commissioning, outcomes and financial information in one place and which could be easily accessed by our specialist Contracts & Commissioning team and all other major stakeholders.

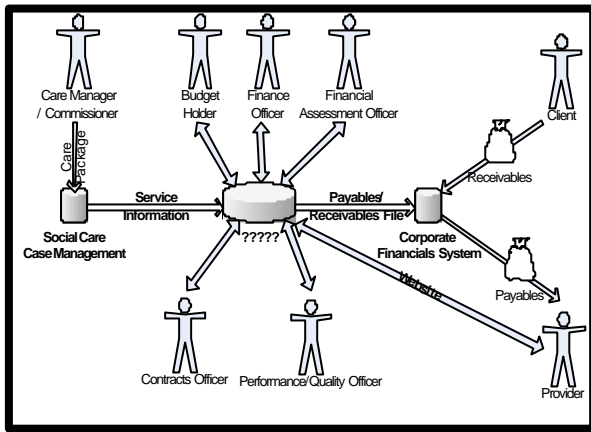
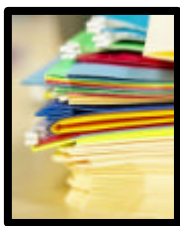


Fig 2: Our Vision

The first step to achieving our vision was to identify our business requirements and set about looking for a system that would meet our needs. We soon realised that the system we were looking for didn't yet exist, so we embarked upon a tendering process to find a supplier that could work in partnership with us to achieve our vision. As the supplier of *Spocc*, Thurrock's Supporting People system, and because of their experience in the public sector, we chose Oxford Computer Consultants (OCC) to design our system.

Embarking on a project of this scale, we knew we would have some hurdles to overcome. On a technical level we needed to ensure that our new system could be integrated with our existing systems, without losing valuable data.



On a practical level, we needed to set aside time for staff who were involved in the project – design consultation, system implementation, workshops etc. - without compromising their existing responsibilities. Finally,

we needed to prepare our colleagues, both internally and externally, for the practical and cultural changes we were making to our business processes.

We started using *Controcc*, our new contracts management system, in Summer 2006 and are already reaping the rewards of our endeavours. We have better contract

management; better quality and self-maintaining care package data; better quality finance information; and better awareness of the overall business process.

Further anticipated benefits of the system are:

- It will enable the Authority to move to Outcome based commissioning
- Contract reporting - utilisation of block contracts, pricing comparisons, etc.
- Flexible monitoring of Outcomes for service users, which in turn will enable us to give Provider ratings (CSCI domains)
- Ease of statutory reporting (HH1, SR1, PSSEX1)
- Collecting all the information in one place will enable us to move to individual budgets with clients choosing the quality, amounts and types of care they receive, safe in the knowledge that the contracts have been approved and are being monitored by Thurrock
- Improved communication – providers will have direct access to elements of the system, enabling them to reduce the amount of paper we exchange such as invoices and purchase orders
- It will allow us to monitor the non-care managed services provided by community and organisations to whom we provide grant funding.



We have already seen reductions in the amount of administration needed, particularly within the finance arena and expect to see further reductions and efficiencies across all teams. Happily, there have been no job losses, as the roles of staff have simply changed to focus more on clients rather than administration. We are now well on our way to achieving our vision and feel prepared to meet the varied and complex needs of a growing Thurrock population.

Jamie Hewitt

THURROCK COUNCIL



If you'd like to know more about this project or *Controcc*, please contact Mike Buckle at Oxford Computer Consultants on Tel: (01865) 305200 or visit www.oxfordcc.co.uk