



Watford and Three Rivers Councils safeguard service delivery with a reliable and robust systems support service



Councils award two-year managed service deal to Civica to administer its revenues and benefits software

Watford Borough and Three Rivers District Councils are neighbouring authorities in the south-west corner of Hertfordshire.

They have a number of joint procurement contracts in place, allowing them to share services and achieve efficiency gains.

One such shared service is revenues and benefits, where the Councils share systems and procedures for processing new claims and changes of circumstances for Housing Benefit and Council Tax.

To help deliver the service, the Councils use third-party revenues and benefits software. Rather than their own IT staff supporting the system in-house, the Councils decided to purchase a remote Database Administration (DBA) service and associated IT services from the software supplier to ensure smooth running of the system. However, recurring IT issues meant that the Councils were experiencing too much downtime, too frequently which had a knock-on effect on service delivery.

Outcomes

- ▶ Reduction in system downtime as a result of proactive processes to minimise issues
- ▶ Resource required to keep the system up and running is guaranteed
- ▶ Greater flexibility and lower cost than recruiting in-house staff
- ▶ Collaborative partnership ensures rapid problem-solving
- ▶ Smooth installation of software upgrades
- ▶ Frees up in-house IT staff to focus on strategic projects
- ▶ Access to wider range of OnDemand services should support be required.

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Emma Tiernan, ICT Section Head at Watford Borough and Three Rivers District Councils

Service desk

available 8am – 6pm



Flexible

out-of-hours support



Ongoing downtime was causing concern

The ongoing downtime was increasingly worrying for Jude Green, Head of Revenues & Benefits for the Watford Borough and Three Rivers District Councils shared service, and after losing a member of their internal technical team, the Councils felt exposed to further issues that they wouldn't be able to resolve without continuing to rely on costly adhoc services from their existing supplier.

In June 2016, the Councils realised that they needed to make changes in order to improve the efficiency of their service delivery. They decided to investigate alternative suppliers and what they could deliver in terms of managed services to support the system, and so approached Civica.



Focus on a partnership approach

At the time, Civica was already providing a fully managed service for revenues and benefits systems (including its own OPENRevenues software as well as other third-party systems) for seven partner councils including Gloucester, Luton, South Worcestershire, Denbighshire and Coventry, so was able to put forward a comprehensive support package.

In August 2016, Watford and Three Rivers awarded a two-year contract to Civica to supply OnDemand IT System Support. The contract covers remote DBA services incorporating technical support for the Ingres RDBMS management system and all associated third-party software products on both client and server infrastructure. Consultants with extensive technical experience provide full system administration support.

As with all of Civica's OnDemand services, systems support is provided via a flexible contract, allowing the Councils to purchase any ad hoc support that is needed, such as server migration and module configuration, at a set, pre-agreed cost, helping them account for any future technical issues.

A significant factor that led to Civica winning this critical deal was that the Councils were impressed by the Civica partnership ethos and willingness to share good practice.

Emma Tiernan, ICT Section Head at Watford Borough and Three Rivers District Councils says, **"With our previous contract, the service was very reactive and each time an issue arose we had to discuss the cost of its resolution with the supplier. Now we have a flexible contract in place, we're able to budget much better, and we're receiving much better value for money."**

To ensure that the partnership remains positive and on track, monthly reporting on performance is provided to the heads of service and regular service review meetings are held.

To successfully deliver the service, Civica works closely and collaboratively with some of the Councils' other suppliers, for example their third-party helpdesk and document management system providers.

Paul Mason, OnDemand Operations Director at Civica says, **"In line with our tried and tested partnership approach, we've invested a significant amount of time in understanding the existing problems at Watford and Three Rivers and working collaboratively with the Councils and their third-party suppliers, we've moved the system support service away from a reactive one to a proactive one. Now our focus is on a longer term plan to make their system even more stable."**

Migration to improved infrastructure

At the start of the contract, part of the initial work that Civica undertook was consultancy on the Councils' infrastructure migration as they moved to a new platform to help reduce the number of outages they were experiencing. While the Councils haven't yet eliminated all of their infrastructure issues, system availability has significantly improved and there are processes now in place that ensure much better management of technical problems.

Jude Green, Head of Revenues and Benefits at Three Rivers District Council says, **"We have a fantastic collaborative working relationship with Civica. Their OnDemand team are more than happy to share their extensive systems and IT knowledge with us. Being able to tap into Civica's software and DBA experience has been invaluable, as those skills are very hard to come by."**

Overall the Councils feel that the improved IT support has enabled them to deliver a much more consistent and efficient revenues and benefits service to citizens, and that Civica has been a contributing factor to this success. Consequently the Councils have already discussed extending their two-year contract with Civica.

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