

Test Valley Borough Council and Forte



Partners in Success



TEST VALLEY, Hampshire's best-kept secret, is arguably one of the most attractive parts of England. The Borough has a thriving economy based on its vibrant industrial and commercial communities, principally in and around the towns of Andover and Romsey, and significant agricultural activity throughout the other 55 parishes.

Out With the Old

Towards the end of 1996, Test Valley Borough Council took the decision to replace its existing Financial Management System (FMS). Their ageing system, residing on an ICL mainframe running Open VME, consisted of General Ledger, Creditors and Debtors.

Challenges for the New System

The Council, in line with its objective to move off its mainframe by April 2000, adopted an open system IT/IS strategy, based on Microsoft Windows NT.

As a result, all core financial systems had to meet the requirements of the central departments, as well as those of the Council's individual business units, with their own devolved financial and budgetary requirements.

In With the New

"Forte, from Cyberscience, was chosen for our new Financial Management System after a rigorous selection exercise, where price, functionality and quality were all evaluated," states David Matthews, Head of Revenues. The new system encompassed General Ledger, Creditors, Debtors, Cashbook and Purchasing.

Team Building

A Project Board, made up of senior Council Officers, was established to take overall project responsibility. The Project Head, supported by the appropriate technical and training

resources, took the on-going project responsibility.

Appointing the Key Players

The Council elected to use the Cyberscience Implementation Methodology. With the aim of familiarising key users on how the system would operate and appear, a programme of continuous parallel conversion of the year's General Ledger transactional data from the old system was initiated.

General Ledger

Early emphasis was placed on finalising the structure and format of the chart-of-accounts and its code formats.

Detailed attention was paid to the form and structure of the General Ledger. Once defined, conversion would then proceed automatically.

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Expanding Functionality

The Cyberscience team, directed by the Council Officers, worked to develop the detailed requirements and specification of some additional functionality requested by the Council.

Raising the awareness of the project amongst the Council's staff was achieved through a series of Awareness Seminars.

Implementation Milestones

Working together, the teams from Cyberscience and the Council headed towards two main implementation milestones – the establishment of the General Ledger, the new Debtor invoicing and collection environment.

The bulk of the coding structures – the posting level codes – were then populated automatically, by conversion of the existing





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code files, using custom-built procedures developed by Cyberscience.

In a very short time the revised and rationalised coding structure had been completed and provided complete traceability between old and new codes, forming the basis for audit checks, data conversion and interim interfaces to third-party systems, which might use the old code from time to time.

As planned, this formed an excellent basis for increasing user understanding of the new system and the users quickly discovered new views of the data through the comprehensive Forte enquiry screens.

Debtors System

In parallel, the Debtors system was set up. Cyberscience provided a conversion of the existing Debtors file and a copy was used to form the basis for training against a familiar environment.

Interfacing to Old Systems

A number of interfaces existed into and from the old system, which needed to be replicated in the Forte installation. By this method, interfaces were provided to and from the Academy Housing Benefits System for payment by Forte, to and from Spectrum Cash Receipting for debtors and sundry receipts, the Country payroll, ICL Council Tax & Business Rate refunds and bank statement transactions.

A series of interfaces with First Software Housing System and the Contract Services System were provided to provide comprehensive CSO reporting.

Improved and Timely Reporting

The Council was very keen to have improved and more timely reporting. Forte enabled this through its Visual Cyberquery (VCQ) module.

Creditor Environment

With the Debtors system ready to be rolled out, attention turned to setting up the Creditor environment. Supplier records were converted and cheque and remittance formats were finalised.



Going Live

In mid-March, in anticipation of going fully live, Debtors went live. All April 1st invoices were prepared and debtors' cash receipts immediately began to be automatically updated daily.

On April 1st 1998, on time and on budget, the other scheduled modules – General Ledger and Creditors – went live.

All replacement interfaces were immediately active, housing benefit cheques were produced on schedule and the first Creditor payments went out the next day.

With payments and cash interfaces operational, the cashbook was automatically live and active and, with the arrival of the first bank statement tape, the bank reconciliation process was automatically applied.

The new interface to accept Council Tax and Business Rate refund details and to produce the refund cheques on a 'one-off' basis within Forte was soon operational.

The more complex Job Cost Reporting system, fed from the various CSO and Housing systems, became operational in September whilst reflecting all data from the beginning of the Council's year.

Now that Forte is well established and widely appreciated amongst its users, the next planned stage – establishing Purchasing and Commitments and a roll-out to a wider devolved user base – is looked forward to with confidence.

“Close professional co-operation between ourselves and Cyberscience has resulted in a very successful implementation,” explains a smiling David Matthews.



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