

Saving money through better IT infrastructure



Blackpool Council worked with HP to create a more stable, resilient and efficient IT system that is now shared with a number of other councils to provide better services and better value for money for Council Tax payers.

Blackpool Council



Recent government reviews into the operation of the civil service have called for local government to deliver better value for money through back-office services, such as IT systems, accounting and human resources. As well as creating efficiencies through better use of technology, local authorities can reduce the costs of back-office infrastructure by creating “shared services” models.

In response to this agenda, and prompted by a joint initiative with Fylde Council to launch a new Business Rates, Council Tax and Benefits system, Blackpool Council undertook a major assessment of its IT infrastructure in 2005. What it found was a distributed computing model with a proliferation of inefficiently used IT resources. Servers were deployed on a one-per-application basis, so many were either significantly under-utilised (with resources sitting idle) or running at near full capacity (with insufficient capacity to accommodate peaks in demand).

Crucially, the assessment also found that there was no real solution in place to comply with the 2004 Civil Contingences Act, which requires all local councils to ensure business continuity and data availability.

From silos to shared services

In helping Blackpool Council reach its objective, HP services carried out a visioning workshop with the council’s IT team. The output of the workshop

resulted in a set of principles which will be used in the development of all future IT projects at the Council.

The solution was clear. Blackpool Council needed to move away from its "silo" model to an infrastructure that was more efficient, and highly adaptive, that would keep data available in the event of a disaster and enable the Council to better meet the needs of the public.

The solution that the Council developed with HP and its business partners created two central data centres. The data centres are located separately so that the IT systems can continue to function even in an emergency but they provide enough computing power to run the shared services for both Blackpool and Flyde Councils.

Choosing the right technology

The team was careful to choose the right technology

in order to allow the IT system to work across the two data centres simultaneously. The data centres store all the data required by the Councils and back up the data in case of an emergency.

Delivering value for money through shared services

With the new IT infrastructure in place, Blackpool Council soon launched its new Business Rates, Council Tax and Benefits system, which it was able to share with neighbouring Fylde Council as originally planned.

This was such a success, Blackpool Council has since won a contract to host the same service for Rochdale Council (a much larger council than Blackpool) – beating off competition from private sector service providers.

Scalability has been built in to the new IT infrastructure which enables Blackpool to extend its infrastructure in order to provide services to many other councils throughout the UK in the future.