

The Mendip Capita Strategic Partnership: Working together to transform operations and increase efficiencies



"Like many district councils, Mendip is facing the challenge of meeting increasing customer expectations with shrinking resources. Our strategic partnership with Capita has enabled us to transform many areas of our business to not only improve the services provided to our customers, but to also secure large efficiency savings."
Harvey Siggs, Leader of the Council,
Mendip District Council.

Overview

■ The challenge

The Council's requirements from the outset were to achieve high levels of flexibility and innovation in order to ultimately reach excellent levels of customer service and increased capacity whilst demonstrating good value for money for its residents.

■ The solution

The strategic partnership developed and delivered a comprehensive transformation programme which streamlined business processes, cut operating costs and introduced new IT applications across the Council.

■ The benefits

The new partnership has contributed towards Mendip achieving successful transformation of its infrastructure, working methods, service delivery and IT strategy. It has enabled the Council to accomplish its objectives of delivering excellent customer service with increased capacity and flexibility, whilst simultaneously achieving cost efficiencies.

Capita has helped Mendip in shrinking its carbon footprint substantially and reducing its carbon emissions by hundreds of tonnes; introducing paperless solutions across its business, encouraging electronic communication and document storage, and replacing outdated IT equipment with modern, energy efficient models.

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Background

Located in south west England, the Mendip District of Somerset has three historic towns – Frome, Glastonbury and Shepton Mallet – as well as being home to Wells, which qualifies as England’s smallest city because of its impressive Cathedral. The district also boasts Somerset’s largest village, Street, which has an impressive retail outlet that attracts thousands of visitors every year.

Mendip District Council serves a population in excess of 106,000 and has an annual budget of £16.2 million. Capita first partnered with Mendip in 1993 and towards the end of the 12 year contract in 2005, Capita re-bid to once again be the partner of choice for the Council. Following a tough evaluation process, in July 2005 Capita was awarded the new 12 year, £30 million strategic partnership contract.

Since the inception of the new partnership in 2005, over 75 transformational projects have been carried out across the Council’s operational spectrum. The transformation included the administration of housing benefits, financial and accounting services including payroll, the collection of revenues such as council tax and business rates, elections management and IT services.

Transformation in the Revenues and Benefits Service

With over 47,000 council tax properties, and in excess of 8,000 benefits cases, Capita was intent on finding solutions to streamline business processes and ultimately deliver a faster, more efficient and excellent Benefits Service to Mendip’s customers. Capita has achieved these objectives by introducing a number of initiatives across the Service, including:

Enhanced customer service

- Pre-booked reception appointments have been implemented providing personalised meetings for customers, creating a quicker and more efficient service. The majority of queries are now receiving first-point-of-contact resolution. This, along with the other measures mentioned below, proved to be invaluable during the recession when demand on the service increased significantly
- Assert, a software package that shortens the turnaround time of an application and speedily calculates benefits, has been deployed
- A fast-track service for homeless customers claiming benefits has been introduced to alleviate the strain on vulnerable customers and to help the Council achieve its objectives in reducing homelessness within the district.



As one of England’s most impressive cathedrals, the building of Wells Cathedral began in 1180 and it has survived over eight centuries with all its associated buildings still intact.

“We’re delighted that the strong partnership working between Capita and Mendip has resulted in us being able to successfully carry out a number of key transformational projects across the Council, resulting in significant business improvements.”

*Mark Chapman, Director,
Capita Local Government Services.*

The Glastonbury festival is the largest green-field music and performing arts festival in the world and brings hundreds of thousands of visitors to the historic town every summer.



Greater resilience

- An electronic data management system, Anite, has been implemented eradicating the previous time-consuming method of physically filing and storing paperwork. Information is now available immediately, to multiple users at once
- With the need for physical storage space for paperwork removed, Capita refurbished Mendip's offices with compact ergonomic furniture and equipment, and in doing so solved a further space issue – more desk space meant additional staff could be accommodated. This helped Capita to deliver its promise of recruiting 50 new jobs for local people, which assisted the Council in delivering one of its key Corporate Priorities – that of supporting the local economy.

Transformation in Financial Services

In order to improve its systems and enhance service delivery, the Financial Services Team deployed the following:

- Agresso, a web-enabled financial management system: eliminating the need for tedious paperwork, speeding up the payment of suppliers, assuring high quality via its integrated workflow and providing easily-accessible information in real time
- Electronic purchase orders for suppliers: reducing the need for resource, paperwork and postage. This, along with the addition of BACS payments, means that payments are now automatically paid into a supplier's bank account on receipt of an invoice
- New secure methods of payment, including online payments: increasing the online payment of council tax bills significantly, from £21,000 in 2007/08 to £547,000 in 2008/09. The discontinued receipt of cash on the Council premises has proven to be more cost effective and has removed the risk of staff handling cash.

Transformation in IT Services

Various steps were taken by Capita's IT Team enabling it to meet its tough objectives efficiently. These included:

- The introduction of the Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL), an internationally recognised set of concepts and policies for managing IT infrastructure, development and operations
- The deployment of programme management standards and

"The most successful transformational project for the Council has probably been the print rationalisation programme. Not only has this delivered significant cashable savings and reduced the Council's carbon footprint, but it has also been a catalyst for a cultural change within the organisation in terms of the way staff use the print service."

Stuart Brown, Deputy Chief Executive, Mendip District Council.

- PRINCE2, a well-reputed project management methodology
- The creation of a clear IT strategy throughout all lines of service delivery and a well documented service level agreement which accurately sets out the client's expectations.

With these new foundations in place, the team was able to begin the transformation of all major IT systems within the Council, which has led to the implementation of a highly reliable, flexible, fault-tolerant and standardised IT infrastructure that now supports, and evolves with, Mendip's business needs.

Capita initiated many projects in order to achieve these IT improvements; some of the key contributory developments included:

- *Server virtualisation:* implementing a virtualised infrastructure which consolidates all feasible existing infrastructure onto a virtual server and platform driven by a storage area network
- *Standardisation and renovation of hardware and software:* replacing multiple operating systems, hardware versions, document storing locations and build types with a single standard for all hardware and software, a locked-down desktop and laptop infrastructure driven by an active directory, and the automated deployment of single-version applications

- *Members Online Project*: resolving the previous disjointed electronic access for Members by enabling all Members to now be contacted by email, facilitating the electronic distribution of documents and communications in line with Implementing Electronic Government (IEG) standards
- *Print Rationalisation Project*: removing 70 outdated printer devices from the Council and replacing them with a multi-functional print, scan, copy and fax solution. Uniform access to the service has been implemented, a printing management information system introduced and the fault-tolerance level increased.

A true strategic partnership

Capita has carried out several high profile projects since the seamless transition to the new partnership in 2005.

The Council has not only experienced annual cost savings – of £200,000 in year one, rising to £450,000 in year five – but, recognising the importance of being an environmentally friendly business, has also managed to accomplish mass energy savings.

The creation of a clear IT strategy and recently renovated infrastructure has dramatically decreased the partnership's support needs and has resulted in an 83% user satisfaction level.

With improved service delivery and a more modern approach to business across Financial Services and the Revenues and Benefits Service, customers and suppliers now receive a much more efficient and tailored service with faster turnaround times, increased quality control and greater flexibility. In working towards achieving this, Capita acknowledged the need and importance of creating open dialogue with the Council's end users and introduced Service Improvement Groups across the different services. Since their creation, these groups have proved invaluable in the progress made to service delivery development by identifying and facilitating key areas of improvement. The transformational projects have been, and will continue to be, a catalyst for continuous improvement and long-term sustainability across the Council, and with both partners determined to deliver the most innovative and effective solution, Mendip's customers are guaranteed to always receive the highest quality services.

"Our valued relationship with a top private sector organisation such as Capita has enabled us to access skills, knowledge and innovation that would not normally have been available to us for development of our services. The strategic partnership plays an important role in delivering Mendip's Corporate Priorities both indirectly, through back office transformational projects, and directly, through the creation of local jobs and improved customer service."

*David Thomson, Chief Executive,
Mendip District Council.*



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