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CASE STUDY

Dubbo City Council and Wellington Council

When two councils come together

Friday 15 December 2017

ONLINE ARTICLE

Publisher

IDM Image & Data Manager

Date

December 2017

Location

<https://idm.net.au/>

They say that breaking up is hard to do, but sometimes the joining up thing can be even harder, especially when this involves bringing together previously distinct and separate organisations - combining people, processes and platforms. More than 80 local government authorities across NSW faced this dilemma in 2016 following the state government mandate to force council amalgamations.

Two regional councils combined as part of the sweep were the City of Dubbo and Wellington Council, located 50km apart on the fertile western plains of NSW. Both were fortunate to have many IT systems in common, but still faced the issue of having different software versions and data sets.

The former Dubbo City Council was running HP Records Manager 8.1, while the former Wellington Council was running HP TRIM 7.3. Along with the data merger Council chose to upgrade to the latest version available, HP Content Manager 9.1.

The merging of Council's major business systems including the EDRMS was a key priority identified shortly after the amalgamation was announced. The City of Dubbo was dominant in terms of staff numbers, with 320 networked users versus 90 at Wellington, which allowed for a simple decision made early on to use its platforms and processes as a base.

Matthew Green, Manager Information Services at the merged Dubbo Regional Council, said "We were lucky that both councils ran the same EDRMS. Both systems at the former Councils were integrated with Council's ERP (Civica Authority). A key challenge in the project was to maintain linkages in the merged dataset."

"The main drivers to merge datasets was to ensure all staff had access to all available information and to ensure business processes could be harmonised across both branches of the newly formed Council.

"Staff need to be able to instantly view all documents associated with a property or person," said Green.

At the outset of the project, solutions provider Information Proficiency was engaged to provide assistance with Scoping, Design, Technical Implementation, Documentation and Training.

Every record in the new EDRMS must be linked to a Name and Address Register (NAR) or Property record in the merged Civica Authority ERP, or council day to day operations would be unworkable. This challenge was multiplied across different modules in Authority for Property and Rates, Water Billing and Customer Requests.

These modules could all have been tackled individually but Council chose to bite the bullet and do all at once, which took a team of 35 ERP subject matter experts across the combined council nine months to achieve, in tandem with Information Proficiency. There were another 10 staff working on the EDRMS merger in parallel.

"We began the migration in September 2016 and achieve go-live on July 3, 2017," said Green.

For other organisations facing the merger challenge, Green recommends ensuring having the appropriate resources on hand.

“Using existing resources can be troublesome if staff are required undertaken their usual role as well as project work. In our case, this lead to very high workloads for some staff,” he said.

With the newly merged dataset, HPE Content Manager 9.1 is now hosted in Council’s Dubbo-based data centre. Wellington staff access the consolidated system over a high speed microwave link that was also constructed as part of the amalgamation.

Simon Blunt, Service Delivery Manager - Eastern Australia, for Information Proficiency, said, “The main challenge was combining the two production datasets into a single dataset to achieve a ‘single source of truth.’

“This phase required that we examine the record types in both datasets, as well as the classification structures.

“We combined and rationalised these with input from both records management teams.”

The two collections of Locations data were deduplicated, and related records managed, while additional fields were rationalised and the data migrated.

External link data was migrated, and re-mapped in conjunction with the amalgamation of the two target line of business systems.

Also, as the two EDRMS implementations used different security models, security relationships for locations and records needed to be migrated while record relationships were maintained.

With the merged business systems now bedded down, council can now address the challenge of digital transformation.

“I’d say both Councils had a long way to go in terms of eliminating paper. The primary objective was to “merge” the systems. Improvements to business processes were put in if the opportunity presented itself, however this wasn’t the priority,” said Green.

“We still have a lot of internal processes that result in a form that must be scanned and placed into the EDRMS.

“In Phase 2 we are now looking to implement new Civica modules that will address internal paper-based processes in timesheeting and leave applications.”

“We also have a lot of work to do importing a lot of unstructured data that lives in shared drives used by both councils.”

Amalgamation hit list

- Harmonisation of Council’s ERP (Civica Authority) including modules such as Property, Rates, Water Billing, Accounts Payable, Accounts Receivable, Payroll, Assets, Purchasing, Applications and Customer Request Management.
- Harmonisation of the two Councils EDRMS to HPE Content Manager 9.1
- Harmonisation of GIS – Standardised on Geocortex and a ESRI backend
- Harmonisation of Email – Moved from on premise exchange servers to Microsoft Office 365
- Consolidation of Councils former data centres in the former Dubbo facility.
- Broadband Connectivity – A 1Gbps Microwave link was established between the offices.

- Standardised Operating Environment – Moved from traditional desktops to virtual desktops.
- Standardised Communications Systems – New Unified Communications System (Phones) and Two-way system are being installed.

Original article published at:

<http://idm.net.au/article/0011803-when-two-councils-come-together>

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