CORPORATE & TRANSACTIONAL

South Holland Addresses Compliance and Improves its Performance Management

Summary

South Holland District Council's system for gathering performance data and calculating resultant Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) relied on a mix of paper forms and Microsoft Office Excel spreadsheets. It was a manual, labour-intensive process that provided little control over the collection of the input data and distribution of the management information reports across the authority.

Performance Management is a key issue for South Holland – it ensures that they do is what they said they would do. Key to this process is the provision of accurate performance statistics - both internally and externally.

Members had concerns about the lagging nature of indicators and the authority's reporting mechanisms and set out to improve the accuracy and speed of data collection, information and records management procedures and technology.

This case study showcases why South Holland had to improve its systems, what the key benefits were, and pitfalls to avoid when developing an integrated information framework.

Improvement through efficiency

Centre of Excellence
East Midlands

emce.gov.uk

Project background

The mission of South Holland District Council is to promote South Holland as a thriving, living, and working rural community and to provide a wide range of community services. South Holland, like every other local authority in the United Kingdom, uses performance information to drive efficiency and effectiveness and to ensure services represent value for money.

South Holland adheres to central government defined Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs). The BVPIs constitute a framework of clear performance measures across the range of local government services, and reflect the importance of service delivery at the local level.

In addition to mandatory BVPIs, South Holland also monitors local performance indicators known as Corporate Health Performance Indicators (CHPIs). These have been developed to measure the delivery of its corporate priorities and corporate health. There are over 65 CHPI indicators, which are a mixture of BVPIs and local KPIs covering the following six areas:

➔ Affordable Housing
➔ Care of Towns and Villages
➔ Secure and Diverse Employment
➔ Improved Leisure Facilities
➔ Democratic Community Leadership
➔ Access to Services

In order to comply with regulatory requirements and provide quality services to its citizens, it was vital for South Holland to improve its performance reporting process. By streamlining the process it has improved South Holland's ability to collect, analyse, and report on all levels of performance indicators.

The new Organisational Development Service within South Holland - consisting of ICT, human resources (HR), performance management and business improvement - will provide the Council with the functionality to collect and input the raw data used to produce the BVPIs, local KPIs, and annual performance indicators.

Quote

"Before this project we used numerous manual processes … potentially leading to errors. This inevitably created time delays … and to reactivity, rather than pro-activity."

Steve Larner,
Head of Organisational Development,
South Holland District Council

An example KPI problem

Prior to implementing the solution, data supporting the production of KPI reports was collected and entered into a spreadsheet for analysis manually. The complexity of the process and the time taken to produce reports meant that it was only possible to produce reports every quarter. The time it took to enter the data, collate it for analysis, and publish it did not allow for Heads of Service to anticipate or be proactive on the actions required to fix issues. And because of the timing of Cabinet and Scrutiny meetings, reports often went to Members weeks or months after the end of the reporting period, therefore Members did not have the means to be actively involved in performance management.

An example of a KPI which was specifically addressed in this project was for HR, and concerned the number of working days/shifts lost to South Holland through sickness absence. Numerous manual processes potentially led to errors, and inevitably created time delays for Heads of Service and elected members receiving reports. Managers were not always aware of absence trends until the KPIs for HR reports had been published, which could be up to six weeks following the end of the quarter. This delay in accessing up to date KPIs prevented managers from analysing absence trends and taking early action.

The solution

South Holland looked at several of the leading performance management software packages on the market, but decided to develop its own system following a previous investment in Microsoft SharePoint. South Holland based their project on this platform in order to remove the need to procure additional software or expertise.

The bespoke in-house tailored solution provides South Holland employees with information at their fingertips in a centrally managed, easy-to-customise platform. By configuring role-based permissions, users are able to share analysis in spreadsheet format without revealing confidential information, and manage document approval, storage, use, and destruction on the server.

The package also allows for improved sorting and filtering capabilities enabling South Holland employees to analyse relationships between key performance indicators and tangible business objectives.

How the project developed

Officers from Organisational Development (OD) together with managers and Heads of Service developed a new set of CHPIs to measure the delivery of corporate priorities. Background data was gathered to give context to the monthly performance data which included benchmark figures (top quartile performance

from all other districts) historical performance from the last two years and targets.

Data entry forms were created using Microsoft SharePoint and reminders to data collectors to enter performance data within 5 days of the end of each month set using Microsoft Outlook. Heads of Service are required to write a brief commentary to put performance into context and describe the actions they are taking to improve the service where appropriate.

Data is synchronised from Microsoft SharePoint to Microsoft Excel and graphs created to illustrate current performance in the context of historical, benchmark, target data and commentary (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 – Affordable Housing Performance Information

The graphs are converted to PDF documents and published on the South Holland intranet (SHINE) within 3 weeks of the end of the reporting period. OD officers produce a monthly executive summary, which contains a summary of the performance results on one page. The graphs and executive summary are brought to the attention of SMT and Cabinet Members on publication, using Microsoft Outlook and a link to the Performance Page on SHINE. Reports to SMT and Cabinet report on action taken to remedy performance and officers can illustrate the report with examples of current performance in the meeting by accessing the performance page on SHINE and finding the relevant indicator.

The automation of the reporting process has resulted in an efficiency of up to two days officer time per month and allowed South Holland to improve the quality and timeliness of its performance reports.

Benefits overview

The output from the more automated collection and analysis of BVPI data assists the authority in meeting the requirements of all CHPIs and BVPIs.

Figure 2 - Table providing more detailed information on the indicators of success for the performance reporting process.

Indicator of success	Type of impact
Average data timeliness	Increased customer satisfaction
Number of manual interventions	Reduced staff input
Amount of efficiency savings in performance indicators data management	Reduced input for improved quality
Time spent in creating report spreadsheets for all BVPIs and CHPIs	2 days per month saving
Time and effort spent to distribute the reports manually	Reduced staff time
Number if incidents where reports had to be distributed manually	Reduced to zero
Time to administer surveys, collect and analyse data and produce indicator	Reduced staff time

Benefits achieved

The Organisational Development Service is now able to quickly create performance reports for all of the key indicators that it decides are necessary to run its business and achieve its priorities.

South Holland employees can easily organise, categorise, and navigate within reports, In addition, they are able to quickly find the information they are seeking.

The time saved in creating and distributing the reports allows South Holland employees to dedicate more time to value-added activities such as report analysis and the definition of action plans.

Improved Business Decision Making

The reports produced for SMT, Heads of Service and Members are now available earlier, and the timeliness of data improved, thus helping managers to better anticipate situations, react more quickly, and provide effective support to employees.

South Holland has improved access to better quality information and presented it in a user-friendly way and in a timely manner.

Improvement through efficiency

Reduced Time to Administer Surveys, Collect and Analyse Data, and Produce Indicators

By using forms and streamlining the data collection process, South Holland is able to deliver results to managers in a timely manner, and improve responsiveness for its citizens. This improvement should lead to increased satisfaction among citizens.

Cashable and non-cashable savings

South Holland has saved around two days clerical officer time per month by automating the collation and production of performance reports. A similar saving has been realised with regards the production of the annual performance report or Best Value Performance Plan.

South Holland now produces monthly performance reports, a substantial improvement on the quarterly performance reports it used to produce. This will allow the authority to react more quickly to performance information and improve performance overall.

South Holland has made these improvements using existing technology, which had already been purchased and implemented for general business use.
It developed these systems using in house expertise and spurned the opportunity to use 'off the shelf' performance management software, in doing so the authority has saved an estimated £10,000 to £15,000, plus ongoing maintenance, licensing and development costs.

Critical success factors and lessons learned

By working with the newest business intelligence tools from Microsoft, South Holland was able to address critical success factors and employ business strategies to improve the quality, reaction time, and efficiency of the performance reporting process.

South Holland's Organisational Development Service identified the following critical success factors and associated indicators of success (see figure 2).

In addition

Encouraged by the success of this project South Holland is now using Microsoft SharePoint to manage projects and replace hard copy business plans with online team sites that allow managers and Heads of Service to more effectively manage their business.

A new Committee System will also be developed, once again it will be based on Sharepoint and lead to a significant reduction in paper based correspondence and Committee Papers.

Figure 2 - Table providing more detailed information on the indicators of success for the performance reporting process.

Critical Success Factor	Indicator of Success
Provide more accurate reports and data	Number of manual interventions, amount of efficiency savings in performance indicators data management
Reduce time spent on collection of data, production, and distribution of reports	Time spent creating performance reports, time and effort spent to distribute the reports manually, number of incidents in which reports had to be distributed manually
Provide Directors, Heads of Service and Members with easier access to information in order to more effectively manage resources and performance	Average data timeliness.
Enable simplified survey administration	Time taken to administer survey, collect and analyse data, produce indicators.

Transferability

South Holland is using performance information to drive efficiency and effectiveness and to ensure services represent value for money. Local authorities in the East Midlands - and the UK as a whole - can benefit from South Holland's example by following the process in this case study.

Contacts

Steve Larner
Head of Organisational Development
South Holland District Council
tel: 01775 761 161
email: slarner@sholland.gov.uk

Chris Allison
Regional Director
East Midlands Centre of Excellence
tel: 0115 977 4921
email: chris.allison@nottscc.gov.uk

Improvement through efficiency