



How a local authority's ICT arm has adopted the service management standard ISO/IEC 20000 in support of its strategic goals

"A major driver for the County Council is to seek to be 'commercial'. With ISO/IEC 20000 certification in place, ICT is demonstrating that we are operating as a business area that delivers for our customers, which is ultimately underpinning our reputation as a trusted service provider"

Sarah Barnes,
Buckinghamshire County Council's
ICT management team quality lead

Customer benefits

- Customer confidence and retention – becoming a first choice provider
- Competitive and commercial advantage – gaining income, but also giving greater access in the business marketplace
- Assurance of conformance to a given standard
- Ongoing credibility – independent endorsement of capability
- Operational efficiencies, contributing to wider cost savings
- A quality approach, with a culture of continuous improvement

At a glance

As a local authority, the core purpose of Buckinghamshire County Council (BCC) is effective and efficient delivery of public services. Its strategic plan has three key objectives: safeguarding vulnerable people; creating opportunities and building self-reliance; and keeping Buckinghamshire thriving and attractive.

BCC ICT consultancy service supports the Council's work and its other customers, including Buckinghamshire Healthcare, schools and academies. In total, it provides service delivery, consultancy and support to approximately 3,500 users.

Why certification?

BCC ICT's standards journey began in 2008 when it achieved BSI certification to ISO 9001 for quality management. It maintained this certification until February 2016. Meanwhile, in 2014 it started an implementation project for ISO/IEC 20000 and, when BSI certification was achieved in February 2016, it migrated to this standard.

BCC ICT saw ISO/IEC 20000 as means of helping to adopt a more commercial approach to delivering its services. As Neil Saunders, the Service Improvement Manager and ISO internal audit lead, explains, "There are strong drivers to become more commercial, coupled with significant budgetary cuts. We find ourselves with reduced resources and the need to increase efficiencies to find savings."

Saunders continues, "We already held ISO 9001, but we needed a certification that was better aligned to our operational service management processes (ITIL), which we identified as being ISO/IEC 20000. There were also some key quality principles and documentation that carried through from ISO 9001 to ISO/IEC 20000."

Implementation

The first step for BCC ICT was to understand the changes required to its existing quality management system, and their cost in terms of resources and ongoing overheads. "We needed to find the right provider to help us through this process," says Saunders. "We wanted a respected industry certification as an endorsement of our ability to deliver a quality service. In addition, it would provide a driver for better process documentation and facilitate continuous improvement. As a well-known, respected organization with a proven track record in the world of ISO standards, BSI was the obvious place to seek advice."

Initial consultation and requirements planning meetings with BSI followed, with input and support from BCC ICT's senior management leads. The key objectives determined for the project were to:

- Demonstrate the commitment of BCC ICT to deliver a service that matched industry best practice
- Develop an IT Service Management Plan, Policy and supporting documentation
- Implement the Management System
- Ongoing maintenance of the current quality management system and processes.

Saunders describes the following steps to certification:

- Use of BSI's self-assessment tool to identify weaker areas of service management and where new or revised documentation was required
- Submission of a customer profile to BSI
- Setting up of the implementation project, and assembly of a project team
- Consultation with BSI in mid-2014, "to take a step back and assess where we were and where we wanted to go"
- Pre-assessment 'Gap Analysis' visit by BSI in November 2014
- First Stage 1 assessment in March 2015, which identified some significant areas for attention
- Options appraisal – the early concerns led the Management Team to consider whether to discontinue ISO certifications entirely, stick with ISO 9001, or continue the move to ISO/IEC 20000. The last option was agreed because it still made good business sense
- Initiation of a second phase implementation project involving corrective actions, arranging repeat Stage 1 and subsequent Stage 2 assessments
- Staff presentations on the purpose of ISO standards, BSI's role, links with ITIL, and general project progress
- Completion of Second Stage 1 assessment in November 2015
- Completion of Stage 2 assessment in February 2016. Corrective action plan for two minor non-conformance areas agreed by BSI and certification for ISO/IEC 20000 awarded.

Benefits of certification

Certification to ISO standards has helped BCC ICT maintain focus and customer service levels, particularly during times of corporate changes, including new regulatory or statutory requirements and local government financial constraints.

"Being awarded ISO/IEC 20000 means that we are recognised for adopting IT industry best practice," says Saunders. "As a result, we now have updated mechanisms in place enabling us to make and demonstrate continuous improvements to service delivery as well as maintain quality of service. This is important because it will allow us to improve customer retention by increasing

customer confidence and satisfaction, and so ultimately build our credibility as a service provider. Best practice tells us what we could do, ISO tells us what we should do, so our ongoing mantra is, "Say what we do, and do what we say!"

Customer engagement, positive communications and KPIs have become areas of further enhancement and importance, providing for constructive service reviews with BCC ICT's customers, business partners and suppliers, as well as helping to improve perceptions of its capabilities. There is also evidence of enhanced synergy between some areas of the Council's business units, which Saunders attributes to ICT services' contribution in its ability to consider processes and people, and not just technology, as part of customer engagement and support.

BSI's role

"From the start, BSI sought to understand our needs and convert these into a suggested plan of action, including realistic timeframes," says Saunders. "BSI's simple self-assessment tool and pre-audit Gap Analysis and reports proved invaluable. They have also been backed up by internal account manager assistance, training guidance and networking discussions at BSI events."

He adds, "A good external auditor provides so much more than just a factual report on what they have seen. For example, they share ideas from experiences with other customers. Our interactions with BSI have grown into a feeling of working in collaboration with a service partner that seeks to add value."

Sarah Barnes, BCC's ICT management team quality lead, sums up. "Getting the ISO certification is a massive 'pat on the back' for the effort that our staff have put into providing quality ICT services. Continuous improvement has become part of our culture, and the introduction of policies and procedures, coupled with ensuring compliance to them, means that we are delivering consistent and robust services."

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