box

London Borough of Hounslow Council Adopts Cloud-based Infrastructure Content Platform to Transform the Way Staff, Partner Agencies and Residents Collaborate With Each Other

London Borough
of Hounslow

"Although Box hadn't been adopted in the public sector before, we knew it had been deployed successfully in the private sector for some time, and we could see that transferability to the public sector would fit."

Anthony Kemp
Director of Corporate Resources

The Challenge

London Borough of Hounslow Council is a local authority providing the full range of government services to over 300,000 residents in West London. It's responsible for everything from housing, education, and social services, to street maintenance, planning and waste management.

Given the limitations of its aging legacy system, the Council's visionary Director of Corporate Resources, Anthony Kemp, wanted to replace the traditional extranet infrastructure with a solution that would provide the 2,500 workforce with a customer-focusseduser-centric rather than IT-focussed centric system that fit the way the Council works today.

A crucial element was allowing secure file sharing and collaboration between desk-based and mobile staff and with external partner agencies and suppliers. Also, enabling residents to access the right information quickly was key in the Council's drive to interact with residents more effectively.

Anthony and his team were looking for something that offered a set of horizontal capabilities rather than a group of individual applications linked together that crossed over features and did not work well together. Given the size of the organisation, the solution had to be scalable to match any future needs, support fast provisioning, be priced on a utility basis and offer ease of use for employees.

All of this had to meet the stringent needs of local government. Coupled with shrinking UK public sector budgets and security being paramount given the sensitivity of information handled by the Council and the need for data protection, moving to a Cloud-based infrastructure content platform was the answer.

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The Solution

The new system now utilises two main components – a central CRM system from Salesforce.com which holds the Council's information and Box, which allows the creation, sharing and collaboration of this information securely between staff, their partner agencies and the Borough's residents.

According to Anthony: "With 2,500 staff using the system, it was really important that the solution we chose worked well at an enterprise level. Box fits the bill. It matches our IT strategy perfectly. I was impressed with the level of granularity that it provides when administering our organisation's information. We were also confident that the roadmap of where this product is going in the future fits the future vision of Hounslow Council."

By working closely with the Box team, rollout has been swift. Once existing documents and files were uploaded to the system, users began being phased in department by department, with around 100 users added every week. All the Council's corporate teams, such as finance, legal and procurement, are now on the system, with additional departments being added on a continual basis.

The Results

Historically, users would create documents such as reports, proposals, presentations and correspondence and send them via email, receiving several different versions back with changes or comments. Now users are creating these documents directly in Box, sending links to the relevant correspondents, who view, edit or send feedback all to one centralised location.

Staff on the road, such as trading standards and highway personnel for example, can directly access documents from the system and make updates from their mobile device in real time, rather than having to perform this task when they return to the office.

Administrators have visibility of all user activity, with a full level of control as to who has access to the document. Within that, restrictions can be imposed on who can just view it, who can comment or make changes, how long the document is available for access and so on. Box issues alerts each time the document is accessed, allowing the Council to track if it has been view by someone not permitted to or if a file has been forwarded without permission and to take the necessary action. This functionality provides Hounslow Borough Council with the UK local government requirement for Impact Level 2 security over their data.

For residents, the task of accessing static documentation such as the latest version of job descriptions, committee reports or information on services, is simplified using Box, as the latest updated version is quickly available to them.

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The Council is also seting up a digital postroom, whereby documents such as incoming correspondence from residents can be scanned straight to Box, which is integrated with the Council's MFPs (multifunctional printers) and a lightweight electronic records system. The OCR facility allows residents to click on links to forms, which they can fill out and put back into Box. The documents can be shared in the same way as other documents in the Box system.

From a personal perspective, Anthony uses Box at home for correspondence, which means he doesn't have to learn a different set of skills when in the office. From a business perspective, the advantage of a consumer-orientated interface that's familiar to users is two-fold. Firstly, new users can quickly be added to the system and start working without a large amount of technical knowledge. Not only does this help with the speed of rollout, it allows IT department resources, which would otherwise have been taken up training and supporting these users, to be put back into the business and used more effectively.

This works well as the Council has found that the simplicity in using Box has enabled users to easily see what can be achieved by the system and to suggest ways of being more effective. The Council's IT team can continue to work closely with Box staff to develop the system to meet these ideas on an ongoing basis.

"I would recommend Box," Antony continues. "Where we've shown it to our customers, the response has been very positive, with people asking how soon they can have it. This to me is a clear indication of the system's success."