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Increased productivity, improvements in data control and time efficiency are vital to the efficient operation of the ITS Department at Portsmouth City Council. The Department is responsible for production, print and dispatch of bills for the main Civic Offices and its 7 Area Offices, as well as providing forms to around 50 Landlord and Contractor offices.

With such a vast quantity of bills and information being produced each day, the ITS Department required a solution that would enable them to do more than Form Design.

Neil Matthews, IT Operations Shift Leader for the ITS Department of Portsmouth City Council was at the forefront in their search for a solution.

"We needed something that did more than form design. We needed something that could transfer files, monitor emails and so forth and we were put on to Objectif Lune. We had a look at it and it just took off from there. We downloaded the trial, trialled it for 30 days and we knew before the end of the 30 days we were going to take it."

Prior to the introduction of PlanetPress Suite by Objectif Lune, the Department's software system did not enable data manipulation. This combined with line printers that used continuous stationery made producing bills a costly and lengthy process.

"There was no 'doing' with it; you didn't just see what you were doing on the screen - it was all hard coded and it was line by line. It was really tedious and it took hours and hours and hours to do a form that [now] takes us twenty minutes with PlanetPress. As soon as we moved up to PlanetPress, it was just a whole new world that opened up to us."

The introduction of PlanetPress and new laser printers two years ago has seen production time reduce by 50%. It has also enabled the Department to include fulfilment of bills as part of the process, removing the need to use the Post Room resource.

"With something like the Council Tax Bills, we used to print those every night and then once you'd printed them on the continuous stationery, you'd then have to run them through a machine which cut them into separate pages and took the sprockets off. That would be all that we used to do with them. They'd then go down to the Post Room, they'd fold them, put any inserts in them and so on.

Now, we print them out straight to the laser and we run them through a small enveloping machine that we've got. When we ran the Annual Council Tax Bills before, we'd print 86,000 and it would take 3 or 4 days. With the laser printers, it probably takes about 2 days."

The ITS Department use many of the features of PlanetPress suite to meet the demands of the Council's many departments. Using PlanetPress Watch the Department has been able to introduce email as a method of distribution to internal and external customers, which has enabled them to streamline their workflow processes still further.

"*The amount of time we've saved is phenomenal.*"

"Almost all of our forms are done through the design tool now. The amount of time we've saved is phenomenal because we don't just print forms and send them out, we email them as well now, which saves a lot of time and it means that the forms are getting there straight away rather than tomorrow or the next day due to the post. We've got a PlanetPress Watch process that picks the file up and loads a template onto it, creates a PDF and emails it straight out to different contacts around the city and when they open the PDF, they can print it out and it looks identical to if we'd sent them a paper copy. It's really good."

Neil Matthews
IT Operations Shift Leader

The benefits of PlanetPress Suite have already delivered a return on investment, but even prior to purchase, PlanetPress Suite proved a cost effective solution for the department.

"We were looking at a different product before we got PlanetPress in and that did half the features, so we were going to have to get two or three different products that would do the same as just the PlanetPress Suite. We worked it out to be about £67,000 that it was going to cost us for the software and PlanetPress Suite was nowhere near that, so we saved about £50,000."

The functionality of PlanetPress has also delivered more flexibility to the work processes applied within the Department.

"If ever there's a problem, pretty much anywhere at all, the first thing they say is 'Can PlanetPress do it?', before they even start looking anywhere for other tools, the first thing they'll do is phone me or my boss, up and say 'Do you know if PlanetPress can do this?'."

Neil Matthews
IT Operations Shift Leader

"The good thing is there is always more than one way to do something, if you want to draw a box on screen there's two or three different ways you can do it, so you're not limited to having to learn one way because that's the only way, if you can't remember that way or you don't want to do it that way you can do it a different way."

The ITS Department has to deal with vast quantities of data on a daily basis. PlanetPress Suite has enabled them to introduce processes to manage the variable data requirements of the Council's billing processes, improving delivery, accuracy and presentation. Production of forms for the Housing Departments is an annual requirement, which previously required production in batches by Area, of which there are seven. The introduction of PlanetPress has enabled the production process to be automated using a coding system that inserts the correct Area address into the correct form. All forms for each of the Areas can now be produced in one single batch, without supervision.

Such enhancements to the workflow practices of the ITS Department that PlanetPress has enabled have not gone unnoticed. The changes have been so significant that it appears everyone is impressed.

"If ever there's a problem, pretty much anywhere at all, the first thing they say is 'Can PlanetPress do it?', before they even start looking anywhere for other tools, the first thing they'll do is phone me or my boss, up and say 'Do you know if PlanetPress can do this?'."

Such an impact has led to an increase in the quality and quantity of the work the Department is able to produce for the Council.

"One of the things that they want doing pretty soon is going to be electronic payments so that people can pay their Council Tax over the web and we'll be downloading a file at the end of every day with the day's payments. We'll be loading that in to another system that will run over night. When tomorrow's file comes in, they want to compare today's file and yesterday's file and then create a new file with just the changes in it, otherwise we'll end up with a huge file with all the archived data. I've written a VB script that can do that and you can run that through PlanetPress. Using PlanetPress Watch you pick the file up and run the script still within the Watch process. It'll check the two files and create a file with the different data in it. The file will be put somewhere else and then another Watch process will pick that up and then upload it. So, it's really good. It is good because the phone's always ringing and people say 'Neil, look, I need to do this, that or the other, 'Can PlanetPress do it?'."

PlanetPress has also helped the Department to automate payment processes still further - internal and external. Landlord Schedules are printed by the Department. A Watch process has been introduced that has enabled the automation of the Schedules which outline payments to go to Landlords. As the system identifies a matching account code and email address, the Schedule is emailed directly to the Landlord. In the absence of a match, the Schedule is sent directly to the printer for posting.

Meanwhile, PlanetPress Search is used to support the payslip production process. PlanetPress is used to print the employee payslips each month. This process includes production of three payslips per person - one PDF, one printed copy and one for CD storage. Each PDF version is archived in a searchable database for use with PlanetPress Search

"You could bring up ten years of payslips and instead of ploughing through and saying, 'I can't find it', you can find it within ten to fifteen seconds and you could print it straight out; there you go. That is what PlanetPress Search is for. It's brilliant, it is really good. I love it."

PlanetPress really has helped Portsmouth City Council take off and in the words of Neil Matthews;

"It'll save you time, money and a whole lot of hassle. It's genuinely brilliant."

The Portsmouth City Council PlanetPress Suite Solution:

PlanetPress for
Document design

PlanetPress Watch for
Process and distribution automation

PlanetPress Image for
Integrated archiving

PlanetPress Fax for
Automated conditional fax delivery

PlanetPress Search for
Real-time access to critical information