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QL Housing Implementation – Data migration

Wiltshire Council

September 2013



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The data migration element of the implementation of the QL Housing application as Phase One of the project has been managed and performed in a satisfactory manner.

We noted areas of good practice as well as other areas where performance should be improved.

Objective

The primary objective of our work on the migration of data from the existing Simdell Housing application and the other supporting databases to the QL application has been to gain sufficient comfort that the migration was materially complete and accurate.

Background

A project was initiated in January 2012 to upgrade and replace the housing IT system. The application, Simdell, had been inherited from Salisbury District Council, the only one of the former district councils which had retained housing stock. Simdell was at the end of its life and lacked some functionality, which had been compensated for by the use of work-arounds and the development of end user databases. The replacement application selected was QL Housing, from the Simdell supplier Aareon UK Ltd. In addition modules from First Touch in respect of mobile workforces functionality were also selected for implementation with QL. The planned Phase One modules of QL and the core business functions of First Touch mobile went live on 30 January 2013, with the remainder planned for phase 2, which was planned to start in February 2013.

Approach

South West Audit Partnership ("SWAP") the internal auditors undertook a review of the implementation of QL, including work on the migration of data. We reviewed their work and the additional work requested as a result of our review.

Overall our approach was as follows:

- Review the approach and report of SWAP.
- Review supporting documentation.
- Investigate specific areas of audit risk.
- Carry out re-testing of key areas.

Overall assessment

Overall we consider that the data migration project has been managed and performed in a satisfactory manner. The evidence we examined indicated that the process went well, and that the application went live on the expected date, despite changes in the Housing department during the project. We note some areas of good practice, whilst also raising some learning points. These are shown in the detailed reporting sections of this report.

We have not included any formal recommendations for management responses within this report as detailed feedback has already provided to the Council by the internal auditors, SWAP, and we have also reported similar learning issues in past reports by us on data migration to new applications.

Good practice was noted in the level of involvement of the Project Sponsor, in the quality of some documentation and in the Council's initiatives to provide good practice guidance.

Areas of good practice	
Involvement of Project Sponsor	The documentation indicated that there was steady, on-going leadership from a single sponsor during the life of the project. This included evidence of him querying the results of testing. A good project sponsor, providing strong, on-going leadership, is an important element of a successful project.
Documentation	<p>There was an inconsistent level of quality with the supporting documentation. However, there were good areas, in particular :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ the pro-forma structure for the user acceptance scenario testing; ■ use of the Aareon system checkpoint reports to identify quickly if there were any migrated fields which did not show values due to mapping errors; and ■ the clear and comprehensive go live cut over plan.
Production of guides and best practice examples	<p>The Corporate Programme office is building up a library of guides for staff and "Best Practice" examples as part of an on-going improvement process, although there is no process for giving formal approval to these toolsets.</p> <p>An example of this is that in February 2013 a pro-forma Test Strategy document was produced as a template for future projects.</p>

Improvements are needed to the audit trail of documentation.

Issues and learning points for development

Documentation – consistency and quality

As noted in the report by SWAP – Migration from Simdell to QL, key documents were found to be incomplete and recommendation 1.1b in that report applies here. Recommendation 1.1b stated: “key documents such as the Project Brief, should be reviewed to ensure that they have been completed and submitted for approval.”

We noted the following:

- The Project Initiation Document (“PID”) was incomplete.
- Data Migration “Strategy” was actually a detailed plan with extract code included. There was no overall test strategy.
- Many documents did not have details of either the author or the date of production.
- Others had not been fully updated – e.g. On the Data Transfer Issue Log the field recording the date the document was last updated showed May 2012, despite evidence of later updates. Some of the issues had not been sign off as cleared
- The Data Transfer Issue Log is, however, a good example of format, showing owner, version, the date last updated and its purpose was clear.

Good quality documentation is essential to ensuring that the project, including the data migration element :

- is effectively planned;
- that the plan is being followed and updated for the impact of issues arising;
- problems are recorded and dealt with properly throughout the life of the project;
- individual and group responsibilities are clearly defined and allocated ;and
- the go live decision can be made in the knowledge that they key elements have been recorded and presented to support the decision.

Areas for improvement (continued)

Better consideration of the need to retain staff with understanding of the old application(s) is needed. Key go-live criteria were not clearly defined and the legacy system was not retained for audit purposes as initially requested.

Issues and learning points for development	
Personnel	<p>The unfinished state of the early project documentation was ascribed to the illness of the initial project manager, and the delay in replacing that person. This possible scenario should be reviewed and a process put in place to ensure that appropriate, if necessary, temporary cover is brought in within an appropriate timescale.</p> <p>During the period of the first phase of the project, we understand from SWAP that there was a reorganisation of the Housing department, with some staff having to reapply for their job. The person identified in the PID as the stakeholder from the business, and who was due to work full time on the project, was issued with a redundancy notice, which was later rescinded. This person was key to the project as he had extensive knowledge of Simdell and was made responsible for the data migration reconciliations and other testing. We recall that during the SAP implementation project the reconciliation of one district's sales ledger was greatly hampered by the loss of staff with experience of the old application.</p> <p>Overall, whilst we acknowledge that these organisational changes are important, it is also vital that the impact of the loss of staff with critical knowledge of application systems, especially during projects involving those systems, is properly taken into account.</p>
Go-live criteria	<p>We were unable to identify where the go-live criteria were specified. The failure to define the key requirements which have to be met for an application to go live can lead to an inappropriate decision on the go-live. The project sponsor indicated his concurrence with the go-live in a "Well Done" e-mail to the team on 30 January, based per the project team, on his having the results of testing and the outstanding issues.</p>
Availability of the legacy system for audit	<p>SWAP had requested that the Simdell live system should remain available for audit testing, as evidenced in the minutes of the project Board Close down, on 20 March 2013. However this did not happen and their testing had to be done on an incomplete test system. Whilst SWAP were able to obtain data by other routes, consideration should be given to having a process for validating the decision to close down superseded applications. In addition to needing an audit sign off, this should ensure that all data subject to legal requirements has been retained.</p>



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