Affinity Sutton Group

With a manual purchase order system, Affinity Sutton was faced with an administration headache. Drives to reduce cost, administration time and ultimately paper, Affinity Sutton was keen to find a better way. After a comprehensive and advanced selection process, the Group implemented Capita IB Solution's Procure to Pay (P2P) system , which has had an immediate and positive effect on efficiency.

Quality Selection Leads to Implementation on Time and Under Budget

With over 57,000 homes and a 100-year history, Affinity Sutton is one of the largest providers of affordable housing in England. As a business for social purpose, the organisation is committed to helping people put down roots. It acts as a springboard, maximising life chances for residents and creating places for communities to thrive.

Over the last 24 months, the business has gone through a major transition project to consolidate systems and processes, including a Group amalgamation in October 2011. "This transition has been one of the biggest change projects in the sector," says Chris Battye, Head of Business Systems for Affinity Sutton.

 "Its aims were to address the management, systems and governance of the Group organisation which meant combining staff structures, bringing systems and processes into a single Affinity Sutton approach and legally amalgamating the three large Registered Providers in the Group into one."

Selecting Capita IB Solutions

Until November 2009, the Group used an Opentext based R-KYV system for purchase ordering. Battye explains, "The old system suffered from a number of outages and was no longer supportable other than on a time and materials and best endeavours basis.

Following a significant outage earlier in 2009, the decision was made to decommission the system before it decommissioned itself, which would have caused us a lot of problems.

In December of that year, we implemented a paper-based system, which meant printing and distributing a huge number of paper order pads. While this was seen as a backward step, compared to the risks of the old system dying unexpectedly without any alternative in place, it was something we had to do."

Unfortunately, the paper-based system, while a necessary evil, placed a heavy administrative burden on the company.

"Order forms were hand written and sent by internal post to the Finance department. With a large number of offices sending order forms around the country it is not surprising that a number of these went missing on a regular basis. This resulted in significant delays and constant expediting of invoices both by suppliers and internally by the accounts payable team," says Battye.

He adds, "This was clearly not sustainable, especially as the manual paper-based system wasn't conducive to effective budget management. A plethora of spreadsheets sprang up across the business to try and overcome this, resulting in a lot of time being invested in maintaining them. It really was an administrative headache!"

Also at that time, the William Sutton part of the business continued to use a product called Findocs, sometimes known as FIDO. "While this system was still operational, the knowledge and expertise of how the product was set up had long since departed the company. The security and authorisation matrices were difficult and time consuming to maintain and system functionality was weak in a number of areas. It was time to find ourselves a modern, Group wide solution that could really take our organisation forward effectively."

Having decided to adopt a new solution, Affinity Sutton outlined the key benefits they expected to achieve with it. "To ensure consistency, accuracy and efficiency, we wanted a single system across the whole group. We also wanted to ensure that purchasing decisions would be based on sound information. In addition, by improving budget management we would have better control over expenditure from all budget holders. Each of these objectives would potentially help to save costs throughout the organisation, as well as increase productivity and reduce the amount of time spent on basic administration," says Battye.

Intelligent Procurement

Affinity Sutton put out to tender for a new P2P solution through the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU). "To ensure we selected the right solution for the Group, we included the business in the selection process and therefore ensured a number of representatives were part of the selection team. Workshops were conducted over a number of weeks with the aim of listening to a variety of views and trying to understand everyone's needs as well as gathering business requirements and discussing best practice business processes to help optimise the implementation. We used the information gathered to ensure that we were using the right criteria to select the right system, but we also needed to be sure we were selecting the right supplier."

Battye adds, "The key to this project was in selecting the right system and supplier and to plan and manage the implementation as quickly and effectively as possible. We decided to work with Capita IB Solutions because they had a proven and established product and demonstrated their experience and capabilities for a smooth implementation and comprehensive project management. We received a number of presentations and visited several reference sites which enabled us to develop a broad and accurate picture of what Capita IB Solutions would do for us and were very confident in our decision."

By carrying out this detailed procurement process, Affinity Sutton was able to select a supplier and software product that was a true best fit for their organisation. "During the procurement process, at our request, Capita IB Solutions introduced the proposed Project Manager and the technical team that would be working on the implementation. They were there through all the planning, presentations and Q&A sessions. This gave us the opportunity to build an important rapport with the people we would be working with and also provided them with a deeper insight into our requirements and specific business needs."

He continues, "Once we started the implementation itself, the whole process was much smoother because of Capita IB Solution's existing knowledge and also their willingness to be flexible and adapt to how we wanted to work. The flexibility and commitment shown by Capita IB Solutions and the excellent collaboration and partnership that had been established between the two project teams ensured the actual implementation and go live were achieved efficiently and effectively and within our aggressive implementation time scale. Implementation commenced after Capita IB Solutions first arrived on site in August 2011 and the system went live on a phased basis, starting in October 2011 and completed on time and under budget in December 2011."

"The implementation has gone very well and we are already realising the benefits of the chosen system. Capita IB Solutions has been an excellent and flexible partner that has understood our needs and helped us implement the system in the way we wanted. The depth of our preparation and the involvement of the right people from Capita IB Solutions from the start of the process has meant the implementation held very few surprises and has been delivered on schedule and under budget. We look forward to continuing a long and positive relationship with Capita IB Solutions," Battye concludes.