

Joint venture company spearheads the transformation of council services through a customer centric model

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Mike Cuff
Chief Executive
Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council

A pioneering public private partnership between Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council and BT sparks cultural, organisational, and technological change for radically improved service delivery

Executive Summary

Five years ago, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council (RMBC) made a commitment to modernise the way it works, improve the efficiency and quality of its services, and put the customer at the centre of all its activities. The council looked to the private sector for support and in 2003 launched a pioneering partnership with BT, a joint venture company called RBT (Connect) to improve and deliver services to citizens electronically over a 12-year timeframe.

RBT is using BT’s business transformation and technology integration expertise to transform Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council into a seamless, customer-focused organisation that can not only innovate and drive change but also inspire employees to deliver increasingly effective and efficient services.

Significant internal processes improvements have been delivered – particularly in Procurement, Revenues and Benefits, HR, and Payroll – poising the council to achieve £50 million of efficiency savings. The creation of Rotherham Connect – enhancing public access to council services – together with the

launch of new initiatives such as Streetpride and greater collaboration with local education and health organisations are enabling vital improvements in public services. RBT is set to continue to drive the transformation agenda and increasingly it is being called upon to share its experience and expertise for the benefit of other local authorities.

Marketplace

Five years ago Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council (RMBC), which provides services to 250,000 citizens in South Yorkshire, made a commitment to modernise the way it works, improve the efficiency and quality of its services, and put the customer at the centre of all its activities. E-enablement of council services, internally and externally, was key to achieving these ambitions: however this required a major investment in new technology and, like many local authorities, Rotherham had considerable financial constraints. The council looked to the private sector for support and in 2003 launched a pioneering partnership with BT, a joint venture company called RBT (Connect).

Case study

Rotherham Brought Together

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Paul Broadberry
Chief Executive
RBT (Connect) Limited

Business opportunity

Public private partnerships represent a new way of modernising councils, improving services, and cutting costs: particularly where the council has the political will to drive through the changes. A number of local authorities have engaged partners to help them achieve performance improvements in this way – as well as to help them cut out unnecessary bureaucracy and move to a customer centric ethos – using systems designed around the user rather than around the traditions of the organisation.

Joint venture partnerships are often preferred to outsourcing because staff remain as council employees and can use their local knowledge and experience. This maintains and improves service standards, while increasing efficiency through the use of technology. As well as reducing costs, such partnerships can also become profit centres by running services for other authorities.

During the 12-year life of the RBT partnership, BT is investing £30 million in leading edge technology, new business practices, training, and better ways of working. The partnership's overriding objective is to achieve more for less and, as a result, the council is set to benefit from £50 million of efficiency savings. Rotherham will also see an improvement in service quality since much of this money will be reinvested into citizen services.

BT solution

RBT is using BT's business transformation and technology integration expertise to transform RMBC into a seamless, customer-focused organisation that can not only innovate and drive change, but also inspire employees to deliver increasingly effective and efficient services. Paul Broadberry, Chief Executive of RBT (Connect), says: "BT has put a very strong system of governance in place – making sure projects are joined up for maximum organisation-wide benefit – and has helped council staff embrace new ways of working."

The RBT vision is about creating an improved customer experience as a whole. Resources acquired through the partnership are essential in helping the council to improve efficiency and services with a particular focus on Procurement, Revenues and Benefits, Operational Human Resources, and Payroll. A major thrust is Rotherham Connect – a contact centre environment integrating the council's front and back-office systems – and the enabling networked IT services.

Early success has lifted RMBC well ahead of Government efficiency targets and by October 2005 it was ranked second in the country in an Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (now the Department for Communities and Local Government) league table of local authorities who have made savings in response to the Gershon report. Greater success was to follow and in December 2005 Rotherham was ranked first of all the Metropolitan authorities.

Many core functions now operate more effectively with smaller teams in place, allowing staff to be redeployed into areas with greater resource requirements. Paul Broadberry continues: "Savings have already been returned to the council for reinvestment into citizen services. This has benefited customers in a range of areas, including improved access to services, cleaner streets, cutting-edge technology in schools, and trail-blazing improvements in the benefits service. A new customer service centre has opened in the town centre, another one has opened in the districts and four more are planned across the borough."

Results

Underpinning many aspects of this transformation is Rotherham's networked IT services infrastructure, which provides the backbone for the organisation. In 2003 it was fragile, under capacity, and lacking investment but a major refresh programme has improved computer access, increased storage capacity and boosted e-government potential. New technology, both at council offices and in employees' homes, supports an award-winning flexible working scheme, which is boosting recruitment and staff retention at the council.

Improved contactability

One of the greatest priorities for any local authority is providing fast and easy access to services and information and, in Rotherham, a new telephone contact centre known as Rotherham Connect now deals with calls from the public 12 hours a day, five days a week. Developed and implemented by RBT following consultation with local citizens, the contact centre plays a key role in providing access to services and driving positive engagement between the council and the local community.

Rotherham Connect supports enquiries about a whole range of services from council tax to parking. It has also enabled the launch of Streetpride, one of the biggest environmental projects in the country, which allows residents to contact a single hotline number to report issues such as litter, graffiti, fly-tipping, or broken street lights to help improve the Rotherham environment.

Creating an e-learning environment

Education in Rotherham is also benefiting from e-enablement projects. The Rotherham Grid for Learning provides fast, secure broadband internet access and email to schools. Developed by RBT, the network connects all of the borough's schools, meaning both pupils and teachers can share resources and access digital tools available through initiatives such as the National Education Network. Looking to the future, businesses, libraries, museums, youth clubs, and community groups will also be connected.

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Enabling collaboration

More joint working between local government and health has been advocated as a sensible way forward for many years and is an approach being strongly encouraged by national Government. An information sharing system was seen as vital for improving care, particularly for the most vulnerable members of society. But there were major stumbling blocks over confidentiality of information, given the stringent regulations in place.

The extra technical expertise and know-how accessed through the RBT partnership has turned this ambition into reality. An RBT solutions architect put together a technical business case – based on virtual private networking technology – for the information sharing project, which was subsequently approved by the NHS Information Authority. Now, vital information giving a complete patient picture is available through one network, enabling decisions to be based on complete and up-to-date information. The end result is better care for local residents. The joint working initiative is now set for a major expansion across the borough.

Greater process efficiency

In line with targets outlined in the Gershon report, a major focus for RBT has been to improve the efficiency of internal processes within the council. One award-winning example of its success in this area is the implementation of a new procurement strategy. Before responsibility for procurement was taken over by RBT, the function was decentralised and the council was not leveraging its purchasing power nor benefiting from economies of scale.

BT's experience was needed to help centralise the function and redesign processes and procedures – implementing a purchase to pay system with an additional focus on strategic sourcing and best practice procurement. Brian Leigh, Head of Procurement at RBT, comments: "The implementation of strategic sourcing and more effective supply chain management has enabled us to leverage our purchasing power and this means that the council now has fewer but better suppliers. This more effective procurement has saved the council five million pounds to date and we expect ongoing savings of around three million pounds each year."

Efficiencies are very visible. Following the automation of old paper-based processes over 100,000 paper requisitions and orders and 70,000 paper invoices per annum have been consigned to history. The time taken to process requisitions has been dramatically reduced, from around 10 per cent of requisitions processed in four days, to 70 per cent of transactions handled in fractions of a second. Rotherham's progress with e-procurement has also been nationally recognised, with the Council securing Beacon Status for its work in this area. Most recently, RBT was named an e-government National Awards winner for its e-procurement initiative.

Reducing benefit fraud

The Benefits Service in Rotherham also illustrates the radical process overhaul delivered by the joint venture partnership. With benefits totalling more than £60 million being paid out annually, prevention of benefit fraud, together with quick and efficient payment of benefits to all those who are properly entitled to them, is vital to both the council and the local community. Yet, prior to the creation of RBT, the council's Benefits Service had received critical reports in 1999 and 2002 and was struggling to manage demand.

The RBT partnership has provided the council's Revenues and Benefits section with the means and capability to modernise its IT systems and overhaul processes to provide a more effective service to its customers. An integrated benefits system now automatically interfaces with the housing rent account, council tax, document imaging, debtors, and general ledger IT systems. A fraud management system is supporting counter-fraud investigations.

The council has now jumped to a four-star rating; all achieved with 20 fewer people on the team. Rotherham is also the lead

authority on the National e-Benefits Project and is piloting a new e-benefits system, which allows customers to check their eligibility against all 57 welfare benefits, irrespective of which department or agency is ultimately responsible for administering it. Once council staff make an assessment, a single intelligent electronic form is automatically transferred to the council's back office benefits system, allowing the claim to be processed without delay.

Transforming HR

Efficiency improvements in Rotherham also extend to council employees. For example, the council has launched one of the first local government implementations of a self-service HR system, allowing employees to keep personal information updated on a secure part of the council's intranet.

The HR intranet site (HRP-i) has been completely overhauled and is being expanded, reducing the number of calls to the service centre, but also stimulating demand for more added-value information to be made available. It is now the second most popular page on the council's intranet, behind the telephone directory. Staff can check on their sickness records and pay details, giving them more control and creating a more accurate HR and Payroll database to further improve efficiency.

Enabling shared services

RBT is helping Rotherham deliver its e-government strategy and achieve its corporate vision of making the district "a prosperous, inclusive and attractive borough where people choose to live, learn and work". Looking forward, RBT is set to continue to drive the transformation agenda of RMBC and increasingly it is being called upon to share its experience and expertise for the benefit of other local authorities.

Why BT?

- Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council has long regarded BT as a trusted supplier
- As a global player with long experience in dealing with government – at local and national levels – BT was uniquely placed to understand Rotherham's needs
- BT was willing to jointly invest in the public-private partnership vehicle required to achieve the transformation

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Mike Cuff, Chief Executive of Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council, sums up: "We're already looking ahead to 2010 and beyond. Our transformation was never just about the use of ICT, but about clarity around our role in commissioning and providing services and the balance we aim to achieve between the two. It's also about partnering with other authorities and building capacity amongst potential new service providers, such as the voluntary sector and social enterprises. These are exciting times for us and hopefully even better times for citizens on the service delivery front."

Technology blueprint

BT has re-engineered the council's core networks, upgraded and re-integrated key applications within front and back office systems, and upgraded and standardised the council's desktop environment. A technology refresh programme has been introduced and ICT support has been improved across all areas of the council.

The council's intranet has been developed and Siebel (now Oracle) CRM technology has been implemented for Rotherham Connect. A broad range of council services are connected through different access channels including the telephone, the internet, email, SMS messaging, and face-to-face interaction at one-stop-shops across

the borough. Windows XP Professional and Microsoft Office System products are creating a common desktop environment, and uniting disparate departmental systems.

Revenues and Benefits uses the Sx3 iWorld claims management system, and Comino Group's workflow and document management system. HR and Payroll is using a RebusHR integrated system combining salary modelling, absence management, staff planning, payroll, and pensions. Procurement uses Version 5 of Cedar's financial and e-procurement software. RBT opted for the e5 web user interface and an integrated e-procurement system based on Cedar's eRequisitioner and eAuthoriser portlets.

Main BT products and services

- Business transformation consultancy and business process re-engineering
- Change management (including organisational re-design, communications, training and skills development, knowledge transfer, programme management and benefits realisation)
- Council-wide technology implementation and re-engineering services
- RBT and RMBC have also worked in partnership on software development and implementation of two national ODPM projects: the National Benefits Project and Working with Business (CRM for Business)

Offices worldwide

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