

Business Rates Retention Scheme at Barnsley Council

Implemented in April 2013, the Coalition Government's business rates retention policy sees local authorities able to retain up to 50% of all the business rates revenue they collect, resulting in it being more important than ever for Councils to ensure that the processes supporting the collection of business rates are as robust as possible.

This new policy has had a significant impact upon local authority budgets, particularly in areas of the country where economic growth is lowest. To prepare for this, the LLPG (Local Land and Property Gazetteer) team at Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council raised with senior management the need to review the business processes supporting the maintenance of data relating to businesses in the Borough, with a view to improving collection rates for the Taxation team and through that ensure that the Council were best placed to minimise any negative effects of the policy change.

The LLPG team are responsible for the creation, management and on-going maintenance of the Council's definitive address dataset (LLPG) and as such are ideally placed to provide the information and intelligence required to support all other council departments through the provision of the most accurate and up to date address data for all residential and commercial properties within the Council's boundaries.



Aims and Objectives

The Council already used its LLPG to assist the Taxation team in ensuring that businesses were identified, and recorded accurately and in a timely manner. In preparation for the localisation of business rates, processes were reviewed and new approaches explored, which was successful in adding new businesses to their NDR register (Business Rates), as well as identifying, tracking and recording change more effectively.

Previous projects in matching data against a variety of departmental datasets and integrating the Council's systems provided a beneficial starting point for the project insofar as:

- Management understand the LLPG and its benefits
- The Taxation department in particular understand the capability of the LLPG to link together pieces of information available to the Council and to pass on that information which is relevant to them
- There is a close working relationship between the LLPG team and the Taxation Enquiry Officers – the staff 'on the ground'
- There is a 1:1 data relationship between LLPG and NDR records, which has been maintained for several years. The LLPG team therefore has

an instant view of what does and doesn't exist in the NDR database as everything in NDR should also exist in the LLPG

- The Taxation team have immediate access to the data products created by the LLPG and GIS team, including the ability to view all of the NDR information spatially
- The LLPG is linked to other internal departments which provide change intelligence relating to businesses, including the Regulatory Services, Planning and Waste Management systems. Further intelligence is provided via the CRM.

With the intention of building on the previous and on-going work that had already been done, a new project with three main objectives was set out:

1. To revisit the flow of information between relevant departments to see whether further improvements could be made to ensure that reporting of business change was pro-active
2. To identify other internal departments which could contribute to the project
3. To identify whether any external products or partners could assist

The project was initiated in August 2012 with an aim of ensuring that any businesses that should be in the NDR database was checked and validated by the end of March 2013. It was additionally intended that on-going business processes supporting change intelligence would be reviewed in the same timescale and would continue to develop thereafter.

What the project actually did

Objective 1:

Revisit business processes

Although the Council already had inter-department processes in place, an important part of the project was to revisit and review these processes in order to determine any improvements that could be made.

Through this review, a number of areas were identified in which further improvement was required. These included:

- Supporting Taxation Enquiry Officers (inspectors) by providing greater access to LLPG data in easy to use formats
- Establishing a formal mechanism for the LLPG team to request site visits via Enquiry Officers
- Provision of maps and premise lists (incl. LLPG and Taxation reference numbers) for site visits
- Tracking of planning applications which are likely to give rise to a new property, business or change of use

With these identified, project plans were initiated to ensure that all improvements could be carried out with as little interference as possible to existing work requirements.

Objective 2:

Identify internal departments to contribute

The Council had already integrated the LLPG widely across relevant departments such as Regulatory Services, Waste Management and the

CRM. In facilitating these system integrations, data anomalies had already generated substantial benefits to the taxation team.

The challenge was therefore to build upon these processes to ensure timely and consistent reporting of changes that give rise to a rating change, and to bring together other internal stakeholders who might hold further information.

The system integration with Regulatory Services in 2010 required addresses to be added to the LLPG before they could be used for purposes such as licensing, environmental health, anti-social behaviour and other activities. Over the last 3 years, business processes have been in place between Regulatory Services and the LLPG Team to quickly and efficiently process and investigate address addition or change requests.



The Taxation teams have been informed by email of any relevant changes resulting from this process and to aid this, the review decided that the systems administrator for the Regulatory Services system (who raised such change requests) would be trained on the LLPG system and would work directly with the team on a part time basis, enabling changes to be made more efficiently.

Objective 3: Identify external products/ partners

Although vast amounts of internal change intelligence was being generated, and even more due to the review process, the final objective was to look at any external products and partners that could add value to the existing processes by providing data sources that could be utilised in the checking and validating of the internal databases.

One aspect of this is the matching of the Royal Mail's PAF file to the LLPG on a monthly basis. The file is supplied by GeoPlace with the intention of maintaining a synchronisation between LLPG and PAF, but the Council have taken this a stage further by passing any anomalies to the Enquiry Officers for them to investigate.

An additional external data source the Council became aware of was the Business Names product offered by Aligned Assets Ltd, which utilises data supplied by 118 Information, who are better known as the suppliers of business information to companies such as 118 118, Bing and the BT Phonebook

The Council agreed to purchase this product on a trial basis to undertake a limited term data matching exercise to determine its value with the hope that it could supplement all existing data sources.

Main outcomes

Across all objectives the project has been extremely successful insofar as:

- There have been 108 reports sent to the Taxation team for

investigation in the last 12 months, resulting in 23 new premises added to the Council Tax and NDR registers

- Direct financial benefits have been identified and quantified for the above
- The LLPG team has been able to support the Enquiry Officers in their work by providing detailed supporting information for all properties, making site visits much more efficient
- Interactions between departments reporting information into the LLPG (regarding business change) have become much more efficient and responsive, especially for Regulatory Services who have direct access to the LLPG database
- Relevant information collected and processed through these business processes is shared with the wider Council via the web systems for LLPG and GIS
- A new data source was identified in the Business Names dataset supplied by Aligned Assets, for which a data relationship can be maintained against the LLPG going forward
- There is an intrinsic value to the Business Names dataset in that it provides information which is not directly reported to the Council. It can reasonably be expected that businesses will be more forthcoming in reporting change to directories such that 118 Information use than they will to the Council.

Financial Benefits

The financial benefits arising from the review of business processes is on-going and

continues to be strengthened the more the LLPG is integrated into departmental back office systems. Each time a piece of system integration work is completed, the wider processes of the LLPG team are reviewed to see whether specific benefits can be derived elsewhere within the organisation.

At the same time, the driver for this work was the localisation of Business Rates policy, which gave a relatively short lead time. The purchase of additional data was made "on trust" with the expectation that costs be at least covered.

At the time of writing, with 6 further 'leads' to be completed, information provided exclusively from the Business Names data has provided an annual revenue gain of £15,021 from 2012/13 to 2013/14. The total revenue gain is significantly higher at £70,137 with this figure including the retrospective collection of previously owed charges.

Conclusions and lessons learnt

What has been demonstrated both by this project and those preceding it is that in addition to the intrinsic benefits of integrating the LLPG with other council systems, there are very direct and tangible benefits to be gained in supporting the work of the Taxation team in maximising revenues, which is particularly relevant at the current time due to the localisation of Business Rates.

By creating data links between the LLPG and NDR databases, the 1:1 relationship between corresponding records enables the LLPG team to see at a glance which records exist in NDR and which do not.



Internally this means that with the majority of the Council's back office departmental systems dependent on the LLPG for updates to their property databases, any address change, amendment, addition or deletion must be requested from the LLPG, and in doing so, any anomalies are quickly identified and passed to the Enquiry Officers.

Similarly, when information is provided from another source, such as PAF data supplied by GeoPlace or the Aligned Assets business database, the team try to match it the LLPG. If it is not

possible to match a (business) record from these sources, then by definition it must be missing from NDR, as the 1:1 relationship is established and maintained. It is therefore supplied as a 'lead' to the Enquiry Officers, who will gather information from the LLPG and mapping systems before undertaking a site visit.

The localisation of Business Rates can be seen as both an opportunity and a risk to local authorities. What Barnsley Council has done is to minimise the risk by maximising the opportunity, using their LLPG to

supply the Taxation teams with more information than they would have had prior to the project's initiation.

All internal processes are replicable by other councils, whilst the decision to procure the Business Names dataset provided a substantial boost to the project and a substantial return on investment. This dataset is available nationally and can therefore potentially benefit every Taxation authority in the country.

