



# Achieving Excellence

in government services

**North East Derbyshire District Council** has made local government history by becoming the first Council in England and Wales to make the impressive leap from 'Weak' to 'Excellent' performance according to the Audit Commission's Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA). Partnering this success was the Best Practice Group (BPG), a specialist in business transformation, solution & service procurement and supplier contract negotiations. BPG is working long-term with NE Derbyshire to identify and achieve a growing list of performance milestones.



### **A story of success**

In the past four years, North East Derbyshire District Council has reduced the time required to process its housing benefit applications from up to 50 days to under 23 days. In addition to improved customer service quality and performance, the Council has also streamlined its administration to achieve £200,000 in annual budget savings, thus exceeding its government targets.

### **Working with the best**

Commenting on the Council's dramatic rise in status over the past four years, Mike Goodwin, Deputy Chief Executive for NEDDC explains: "If you want to be excellent you have to mix with the best. In the past five years we have invested over £5 million in new IT solutions like our flagship Revenue & Benefits system. In this, we have been fortunate to work with leading partners like BPG, who managed the project from procurement to implementation, and Capita Software Services (CSS), who supplied their best-of-breed Academy solution."



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Mike Goodwin  
Deputy CEO



### Customer-centric Revenue & Benefits

According to Goodwin, 2004 was a watershed for NEDDC. This was the year the council decided, in response to government mandates, to embark on a programme to make their service environment more efficient and customer-centric. As he puts it: “We decided to start with the biggest challenge, reasoning that if we could achieve greater efficiencies in our benefit services - an area that has such a major impact on the lives of our most deprived customers - then we could also succeed in the other departments.”

To realise its objective, NEDDC decided to invest in a major system upgrade to handle customer information electronically and to enable the public to interact with council services via the Internet. “The time was right to introduce radical new technology because our old legacy system was tottering and we had to replace it by April 2007, after which the vendor was withdrawing support.”

### Finding the exit

In mapping out a new Revenue & Benefits strategy, NEDDC decided to rationalise its resources and share the service across a consortium of five Councils within the region. An IT solution was duly selected and a contract signed to purchase it. Unfortunately, after a two-year struggle trying to implement the system the consortium finally came to the conclusion that it was never going to adequately meet their expectations. However, they were locked into a long-term contract, or so they thought. At this point the consortium brought in BPG to see what could be done. BPG reviewed the vendor’s performance against the contract and successfully negotiated an exit in May 2006 so that the contract could be dissolved with an agreed settlement.

### Second time right

NEDDC was now free to move forward with a new procurement. Says Mike Goodwin: “Exiting the previous contract was tricky waters for us, but BPG held our hand every step of the way.” As soon as the former commitment was resolved, and with the clock ticking, Goodwin’s team lost no time in sourcing a new Revenue & Benefits system supplier.

### Beating the deadline

After due consideration, the Academy solution from Capita Software Services (CSS) was selected. The council was able to move with speed because while exit negotiations were in progress with the former vendor, BPG was busy helping NEDDC draw up a detailed set of new system specifications. Because of this advance preparation and Capita’s responsiveness, the new system was up and running within seven months, giving the council ample time to settle it in before retiring the legacy application.

### The supplier as expert

One of the most effective strategies NEDDC employed for the new project, at BPG's suggestion, was to invite CSS onsite to scope the project on the basis of a fee-based 'pre-project' study. This approach placed the responsibility for mapping the system's specifications with the supplier who, after all, knows its solution's capabilities better than anyone else.

It also gave CSS a depth of exposure to the Council's environment and provided detailed insight into the requirements at a level not typically available to vendors up-front. This meant that both the customer and supplier were clear from the start about the project's parameters, which mitigated any downstream disagreements, project delays or points of escalation. These advantages were especially crucial considering NEDDC's non-negotiable go-live deadline.

### A win-win project

"The Revenue & Benefits implementation was just as much a success for us as it was for the Council," states Julie Abbot, project manager at Capita Software Services. "The NEDDC project has been the most smoothly executed implementation I've worked on in years and was an extremely positive experience for our whole team. So much so that we now use it as a flagship reference site for our local government solutions."

### Dedicated project management

As Abbot went on to explain, one of the central ingredients of the NEDDC success was having an independent project manager at the helm. "Typically we find going into a project that because the customer also has a day job, they are unable to devote the time needed to handle all the details of implementation management. Having BPG there to look after the stakeholder communications and all of the other project logistics was vital to its smooth running. And because BPG was regarded by the Council as a trusted expert voice, they were able to flag up issues and get decisions on priorities, troubleshoot and help to steer things in the right direction."

### Staff satisfaction & quality services

BPG's ability to manage the client and supplier relations and all of the software testing and other implementation issues, not only helped the Council beat its immovable deadline but has created a Revenue & Benefits system that delivers optimum efficiency with minimised staff.

As Mike Goodwin explains: "We now support Revenue & Benefits with only half the personnel required by similar-sized Councils. This enables us to redeploy resources to customer-facing tasks that provide more job satisfaction while improving customer service levels."



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Julie Abbott  
CSS project Manager



### A blueprint for other projects

The Revenue & Benefits project has been such a winner for NEDDC that BPG's procurement and implementation methodologies are now being adopted by other departments. Says Goodwin: "Revenue & Benefits has been judged by the Council and our peers as a model implementation and is providing a blueprint others can follow. Not only does this help amortise the R&B project investment, it enables the Council to work 'smart' by employing a single, standardised best-practice strategy across the board - one that can also be applied applied by shared services across the region."

### Business & ICT transformation

Since Revenue & Benefits went live, BPG has gone on to advise NEDDC on a number of other business and ICT transformation initiatives. These include rationalising IT support centres, integrating back office and customer-facing systems and undertaking a major organisational cost saving review. "Now that we are in the top quartile of performance," points out Goodwin, "we don't intend to rest on our laurels, and so we are especially pleased that BPG is alongside in our continuing pursuit of excellence."

### About Best Practice Group

Best Practice Group (BPG) provides high quality services and expert consultancy to public and private sector clients, assisting with the procurement and implementation of both insourced and outsourced business solutions. BPG's advice is impartial, vendor independent and based on a unique blend of contract management, commercial law and IT knowledge. Consultants take a proactive, hands-on approach in managing complex IT deployments and business transformation projects, and are committed to achieving certainty of outcome with reduced customer risk and a lower overall cost of solution ownership. BPG's reputation for delivering high quality results is based on a track record of success with over 500 referenceable UK-based clients.

*BPG's specialist capabilities include: Developing business cases, identification of outcomes and key performance measures, requirements definition, OJEU/OGC/Catalyst procurements, supplier evaluation, contract negotiations, due diligence, gateway reviews, project readiness assessments, implementation management, business transformation, supplier relationship & contract management, project health checks, risk mitigation, project recovery & contract re-negotiation, dispute resolution, termination & compensation, exit management and expert witness services.*



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Mike Goodwin  
Deputy CEO



#### Headquarters

Oakcroft House  
70 Albert Road West  
Bolton  
BL1 5HW

#### Regional offices

8 Victoria Quay  
Riversway  
Preston  
Lancashire  
PR2 2YW

130 Aztec  
Aztec West  
Bristol  
BS32 4UB

70 St. Mary Axe  
London  
EC3A 8BD

[www.bestpracticegroup.com](http://www.bestpracticegroup.com)

E: [advice@bestpracticegroup.com](mailto:advice@bestpracticegroup.com)

T: 0845 345 0130