

chris meets Council's **challenge**

Cheltenham Borough Council provides services that reach out to everyone in the community and when it came to specifying a Payroll and HR solution, it required a platform that was equally broad in scope. Not only did it have to meet local government conditions of service, varying pay frequencies and annual incremental adjustments, it had to provide accurate best value indicators plus management reporting facilities. The solution was implemented by Frontier Software, whose integrated Complete Human Resource and Payroll Information System (chris) was specified and installed in record time, ensuring continuation of the Council's payroll service and delivering a level of flexibility that has enabled the Council to enhance its entire payroll & HR processes.

Responsible for making many important decisions that affect all those living in the area, Cheltenham Borough Council took the opportunity presented by a re-structuring of its organisation to combine its Payroll and HR functions under an integrated software platform.

"Unfortunately, we (initially) ran into major problems with a supplier and had to terminate the contract," recalls the Council's Payroll & Performance Manager, Clive Minett. "However, Frontier Software stepped in with its chris solution that was recommended to us by other local authorities in the region."

"Frontier Software ensured that deadlines were met and any problems quickly resolved."

According to Clive, Frontier Software's chris solution was implemented in record time and up and running within just a few months. "Frontier Software's knowledge of the product, together with their understanding of Local Government and the requirements of the Inland Revenue etc., ensured that deadlines were met and any problems quickly resolved."

At first, chris was used to process just two payrolls – one monthly and one weekly. However, as the re-structuring project continued, the Council expanded its new payroll facilities to encompass four groups – Corporate Services; Environment; Economic & Business



Improvement; and Social & Community – and inherited a number of pay frequencies from various departments that had previously been contracted-out.

"At the time, one of the major concerns of the Council was that we would need to

change some of our internal processes to meet the capabilities of the new system. But in fact, we found chris flexible enough to allow us to maintain and build on our payroll processes, despite our team being comparatively small (just three members)."

Soothing growth pains

With the Council now running five payrolls in total – two weekly and two monthly (permanent personnel), and one four-weekly (casual workers) – chris has proved its capabilities. The system handles both the monthly payrolls – including adjustments such as overtime, mileage forms, expenses and sickness/absence – as well as processing the data entered from the timesheets of those paid on a weekly basis. chris then outlines payments due and breaks these down into separate cost centres according to where the money should be allocated – a key requirement of the Council. Furthermore, Local Government conditions of service, such as sick pay and employee entitlements based on length of service, plus spinal column points according to annual incremental pay scales, are all administered via chris.

As Clive points out, the above functions are just some areas that Frontier Software has further developed within its platform – in line with not only the needs of local authorities, but also the changing IT environment.

Having installed chris on an NT 4™ server in a Windows 95™ environment, the Council has since migrated applications to a Windows 2000/2003™ server environment using Active Directory™ to make best use of policies and security, and has also rolled out a mixture of Windows 2000™ and XP™ clients. Consequently, it upgraded to Frontier Software's chris²¹ solution, which took just two days to implement.

"From an IT perspective, we encourage our departments to keep up-to-date with software versions and patches, to resolve bugs, issues and enhancements to their applications," explains Paul Woolcock, ICT Infrastructure Manager at Cheltenham Borough Council. "The chris²¹ application is installed on a Windows 2003™ server running within a Windows 2003 Active Directory™ environment. We are able to utilise policies within this environment to standardise our desktop environment, which enabled us to undertake an efficient upgrade."



Clive Minett, Payroll & Performance Manager, Cheltenham Borough Council.

Building on IT

"With the chris²¹ product we are benefiting from even more advanced capabilities," confirms Clive. "As well as the statutory changes, such as Internet filing, the system brings improved reporting facilities, allowing us to enhance the use of management information held within the system." 'Best value' indicators for instance – which encompass categories such as sickness/absence, disabilities, early retirements, ethnic minorities, gender – and how these are broken down in relation to the top five percent of earners, must be reported annually to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and also updated quarterly and half yearly by the Council's Business Support Group (part of Corporate Services). "This data can simply be downloaded from chris²¹ into Excel™ – saving us an immense amount of time," Clive continues.

In addition, everybody in the HR and Payroll Division has access to chris²¹ and the Windows™-based GUI means that they feel at home in using the Report Designer to create reports for other functions too.

The Council is also leveraging chris²¹'s recruitment module to simplify its processes as well as improve training and development. Meanwhile, Frontier Software's Vehicles module is said to have proved very useful for setting up and processing mileage claims.

"The level of support provided has been an important factor," adds Clive, who regularly attends Frontier Software's User Groups. "If we do encounter a problem, the help desk gets back to us with a solution, but very rarely do we find any shortfalls." Indeed, the Council had originally specified a customised download to its financial management system as part of its re-structuring project, but discovered that with the flexibility of chris²¹'s Report Designer, there was no requirement for it!