

Leekes Group cultivates **efficient payroll** with chris²¹

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Summary:

Leekes Group, one of Wales' leading independent retailers, serves both domestic and international customers. The company has grown significantly over the last decade and now employs some 1,300 permanent and casual staff. As well as operating a chain of department stores selling home and garden wares, the company has a retail & leisure division comprising a four-star hotel, golf and spa resort. A customer of Frontier Software for more than a decade, it has been able to evolve its Complete Human Resource and Payroll Information System (chris) in line with its growing business and, with further expansion planned, Frontier Software's chris²¹ continues to provide Leekes Group with an efficient, flexible and reliable payroll operating system.

Challenges:

- Replace outmoded financial services software
- Facilitate numerous payrolls resulting from business-line expansion
- Implement reporting capabilities to meet HR and annual budgeting requirements

The solution:

chris²¹'s Human Resource and Payroll Management core modules; Mileage Payment & P11D

Top benefits:

- Integrated HR & Payroll platform providing dedicated, multi-functional and highly-flexible payroll operating system
- Centralised demographic database meeting varied payroll needs of both site-specific and group HR teams
- Secure remote access with 24/7 system availability



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Leekes Group is one of the most famous family-run businesses in Wales. The independent home retailer was established by James Henry Leeke in 1897 as a traditional builder's merchant selling ironmongery and hardware from the front room of the family home in a small terraced house in Clydach Vale. In business for more than a century, it expanded in the '60s with the opening of a Home Improvements Centre in Tonypandy, followed by the opening of department stores in Llantrisant (1977), Cross Hands (1984) and Melksham (1992). Today, the company group is comprised of a retail & leisure division, four department stores, a 4* Hotel & Resort, head office, distribution and warehousing facilities, and employs approximately 1,000 permanent staff, plus 300 casual workers.

A period of business diversification in the early 1990s first prompted the company to investigate an alternative approach to processing its payroll. The addition of the Melksham department store and purchase of a golf club in the Vale of Glamorgan – which has since been developed into the Vale Hotel, Golf and Spa Resort – meant that many new staff and a variety of payrolls were to be catered for. However, the legacy accounting software package in use was unable to cope with the demands of administering multiple payrolls for the growing number of employees and new business lines.

“The old payroll system was very basic. Since there was no report writer, we had to calculate overtime manually and timesheet data entry was limited given that we could only input basic hours and double time,” says Stuart Leeke, Company Secretary at Leekes Group. “We required a system that could support numerous payroll runs and types, as well as integrating other HR functions such as statutory reporting relating to benefits and appropriate expenses.”

Stuart investigated a number of payroll software solutions that could provide greater functionality and also meet future business expansion, a key requirement being that the selected system be compatible with Score UNIX, the IT environment employed by Leekes Group at that time. “We identified three potential candidates that could meet our needs – McDonnell Douglas, Peterborough and Frontier Software. Of these, Frontier Software's chris platform was by far the most competitive option when it came to supporting the integrated feature sets we required.”

A flexible and scalable solution

Having specified Frontier Software's chris solution – including Human Resource and Payroll Management core modules, Travel and Subsistence/Vehicles and P11D (for statutory reporting) – Leekes Group commenced implementation in February 1994 with completion targeted for April, the start of the new tax year. "Delivery was straightforward and once chris was set up, we simply entered the necessary data and were able to meet all of our initial objectives," says Stuart. The project was completed on time and Frontier Software was also able to provide bespoke software development to meet the company's specific challenges. "Although initially, a dedicated Time & Attendance system was not available, the Frontier Software team was able to build a solution that integrated with our existing time recording infrastructure, and also developed software to process commission structures for the sales teams."

Using chris, Leekes Group was able to establish a demographic HR database dedicated to its numerous payroll requirements. Comprising staff names, addresses and roles, the chris database can scale to accommodate a virtually unlimited number of staff records, and provides the flexibility for the HR team to administer both monthly and weekly payrolls. Although most staff are now paid on a monthly basis, weekly payrolls are still run for sub-contractors. Additional payroll requirements include the processing of overtime, plus complex commission structures based on variable salaries and calculated on a monthly basis. Regarding the latter, staff simply enter their monthly sales figures into chris, and their commission is calculated and added to the monthly payroll automatically.

In addition to these features, an integrated P11D reporting module allows Leekes Group to meet UK statutory reporting requirements for benefits and appropriate expenses, by presenting data to the Inland Revenue in the approved format for electronic data interchange (EDI). Furthermore, a Travel and Subsistence/Vehicles module allows the company to calculate vehicle mileage payments, enter this data into its payroll system and create vehicle history files automatically – ensuring compliance with statutory rules for payment in accordance with vehicle type and number of miles travelled etc.

Centralised payroll & reporting capabilities

For Stuart, one of the key benefits of using chris has been the ability to obtain detailed information from payroll data using the system's advanced reporting capabilities. "Information can easily be extracted and manipulated to obtain whatever we need," he explains. The HR team can report on monthly payroll statistics, obtain information such as starters, leavers and top 50 earners, and audit all HR/payroll-related activities as required. Furthermore, the ability to compile key statistics on personnel, such as male-to-female ratio and age definitions, ensures that the company is able to plan ahead effectively for key retirements and job vacancies.

"We do work well with the chris system," confirms Bev Sulston, Group HR Manager at Leekes. "We can create many reports to audit the payroll process both before and after running payroll. The system also interfaces well with the needs of the finance department, allowing us to cost-split staff salaries between departments to provide accurate profit and loss (PNL) data. We also use chris for the softer side of the HR function, as its many functions enable us to ensure staff welfare – for example, by reporting on service milestones and birthdays."

The Leekes Group has continued to evolve its payroll operating system in line with operational needs and business growth, most recently upgrading to Frontier Software's latest chris²¹ solution, which runs on a Microsoft Windows, server-based environment. HR departments based at individual stores are now networked with head office, where the group's HR team has centralised hierarchical access to all 1,300 employees, plus auditing facilities to ensure security and accountability. "The way the system is networked means that our stores teams can handle all staff data (leavers, starters etc.) and be quite autonomous, while we can oversee them via monthly reporting," says Bev. "And we can also work remotely, so we are not tied into a 9-5 system, which has been a key benefit for me."

With so many features now available within the chris²¹ system, Bev suggests that new users take full advantage of the support available from Frontier Software. "We are still finding features that prove to be very useful. My advice to new users is to ensure you utilise the support available from Frontier Software and explore the system's full potential. The chris²¹ guys are extremely knowledgeable and helpful, and we have great confidence in the Frontier Software team."

