Case study

Slough Borough Council
Delivering major transformation for Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council:

How back-office process automation is increasing efficiency, productivity and strategic focus

Challenge: to empower the Council to deliver more for less

Mounting spending cuts, coupled with the introduction of the Welfare Reform Act, resulting in higher volumes of more complex enquiries from citizens, are placing increasing pressure on front-line public services across the UK. With the low-hanging fruits already picked as part of their 10-year partnership, Arvato worked with its client Sefton Council to explore new approaches to further increase efficiencies and drive transformation.

In 2015, Sefton Council became the first local authority in the UK to trial Robotics Process Automation (RPA) in its revenues department. The pioneering project was designed to automate repetitive, transactional processes and prove that the technology lends itself to being used in local government, where a high proportion of administrative tasks currently take up valuable employee time.

Successes:

- Arvato has achieved 99% of key performance indicators (KPIs) across all service areas since the beginning of the partnership in 2012.
- Council Tax and Business Rates collections rates have improved by 2.5% and 2.2% since 2012/13 respectively, collecting over £7.4m and £7.8m more annually in 2015/16.
- In customer services, service levels have been improved by over 15% while facing an increase in call volumes of 20%.
- 284,000 calls are handled annually, with 26% more telephone contacts now answered within 30 seconds and 28% more customers seen within 30 minutes compared to 2012/13.
- The partnership retained 100% of transferred employees and achieved 98% of its Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) during transition.
- Following the Lean Six Sigma training, efficiency savings of well over £60,000 were identified, including cash savings of more than £2,000.
Solution: delivering transformation in partnership

RPA uses software to create an agile virtual workforce which mimics human interaction by following rule-based processes to complete tasks. The RPA implementation at Sefton forms part of a combined, end-to-end solution involving Arvato’s back-office transformation expertise and robotic software from automation specialists Blue Prism.

At the beginning of the project, Arvato automated three processes in Sefton’s revenues department to ensure the solution was accurate, robust, auditable and scalable, before extending it to cover a number of high-volume tasks across the department. These vary in complexity, from signing up people to direct debit payment for Council Tax and processing discount applications, to indexing documents and assigning them to specific workflows.

To ensure success from the outset, Arvato created an ‘Agility Team’ to run the design, development and implementation of each process. This included a Project Lead Manager assigned to work directly with Blue Prism to create a certified automation capability, which enables governance and change management to be set up and compliance with security and audit regulations. Existing Arvato employees were also trained to become accredited Blue Prism RPA developers; they are supported by Process Designers who create the process flow charts – a vital step in identifying the tasks within the department that RPA could easily replicate. The IT team also set up the virtual unit and ensured that all security requirements were met.

Throughout the project, Arvato involved employees from the revenues department and the wider organisation to help them understand what the project is and how it will affect them. Not only did this help to address any reservations surrounding RPA, but it allowed those staff members with the greatest level of knowledge to help craft how the new processes should work.

“Ruth Bagley, Chief Executive, Slough Borough Council

"The partnership is underpinned by collaboration, open and honest communications and a commitment to improving the lives of the citizens of Slough. Since the beginning of the partnership in 2012, we’ve made significant improvements in service delivery and efficiencies, which we couldn’t have achieved without Arvato.”
Putting people at the heart of the transformation

Investment in people and training has been a key strategy from the outset, to ensure the partnership has the talented people needed to drive transformation and deliver excellent services to residents.

At the beginning of the partnership, all transferred employees completed an introductory Lean Six Sigma training, a management technique designed to identify improvements and further efficiencies. Staff were then given the opportunity to review services, focusing specifically on their individual work area. An employee survey showed that people felt more empowered to make changes to reduce costs and improve services to customers.

As part of Arvato’s commitment to provide 117 apprenticeships, a joint programme was created to offer local people aged between 16 and 18-years-old roles across a range of services from customer services to ICT, leading to an NVQ Level 2 in Business Administration. More than 30 apprentices have been hired since 2012 – 63% have subsequently secured full-time roles, compared to the 23% national average – with a further 40 brought on in June 2016.

Commitment to community engagement

As a partner sharing the same values as Slough Borough Council, Arvato is actively engaged in the local community:

- Arvato has created 200 new jobs at its Slough headquarters following a customer services deal with BMW.

- A recent ‘Get into Technology’ programme delivered with Fujitsu and the Prince’s Trust saw two IT apprentices secure 12 month positions.

- Arvato’s teams in Slough support various national and local charities, including the Prince’s Trust and Thames Hospice and delivers workshops to local school pupils about poverty and the support available through Slough Borough Council for people in need.

- Arvato is a board member of Slough Aspire, a programme designed to help the local community develop employability skills.

- Arvato supports the Council’s Employ-Ability scheme to help disabled people into employment.

- Arvato sponsors the Slough Business Awards and supports the Council’s Smart Commute scheme.

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Arvato is a trusted global business outsourcing partner to the private and public sectors in the UK and Ireland. With more than 50 years of experience in outsourcing, Arvato combines expertise in business process outsourcing (BPO), financial solutions, customer relationship management, supply chain management, and public sector and citizen services to deliver innovative, individual solutions. Arvato has long-term partnerships with some of the most respected companies in the UK and globally, as well as innovative public sector clients.