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ideas into action

Easier asset management for Middlesbrough Council

Local authority property team works more efficiently and reduces risk with Civica Property Management...

Middlesbrough Council worked closely with the team at Civica Property Management (previously known as The Technology Forge) to carefully migrate its TF asset management system to a cloud solution. Today, the Property and Commercial Services team empowers building managers and maintenance teams with up-to-date and easily accessible information on properties and work schedules.

Middlesbrough's Property and Commercial Services department manages a substantial portfolio of property. The Council has numerous operating models across its operational estate, which include full ownership and management, shared space for front-line services, and leased-in and leased-out accommodation. Middlesbrough employs its own direct labour organisation (DLO) for both planned and reactive maintenance, as well as using private contractors for specific tasks.

The Council is a long-standing customer of The Technology Forge, a property and asset management software provider that became part of Civica in 2022. Middlesbrough initially purchased the company's on-premise software in the early 2000s to manage its buildings and estates, subscribing to a wide range of modules including Condition Survey, Property Register, Asbestos, and Helpdesk.

The move to cloud

In 2018, the Council began its migration to tf cloud, a software-as-a-service (SaaS) solution now known as Civica Property Management. The Property and Commercial Services team wanted to be able to support mobile working with their DLO and building managers and to make their data available and accessible across the Council.

1 Successful, carefully managed migration to cloud solution

2 Asset information is always accessible and up to date

3 Empowers building managers and maintenance teams

"Building managers can now log on from anywhere and see up-to-date information on their property: it empowers them to take control of what's happening there."

Lindsey Bell, Logistics and Compliance Manager, Middlesbrough Council.

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While the on-premise system required time-consuming changes and upgrades, a cloud-hosted model promised to radically simplify how the system worked.

Time well spent

Middlesbrough took time to make sure the migration succeeded. As project manager Victoria Sturdy says: "I'd advise anyone thinking about a migration to do this: it saves a lot of headache at the end."

For the first eight months, the Council and software teams worked together on a major data cleanse. At the same time, they took every process in tf facility, the on-premise system, and reinvented it in the Civica Property Management cloud solution to make sure the outcomes were the same. Then, the cloud solution was rolled out with just one team, who spent four months test-running it side-by-side with tf facility to check that it was delivering the required results.

"We spent a year on the process, but it was time well spent. It's important to get the data right and to make sure you have the functionality you need before the new system is rolled out. It also gives people time to get to know and understand the new system."

Victoria Sturdy, Project Manager, Middlesbrough Council.

Collaborative relationship

Although Civica met many of Middlesbrough's needs out of the box, some changes and enhancements were needed to meet the Council's evolving needs. Lindsey Bell notes that the Civica team "always worked with us to find a way to make it work – it was a strong, collaborative relationship." Once the testing phase was over, the final migration to the cloud solution took just a couple of weeks.

Everything in one place

"Empowerment" is a word that describes one of the most valuable ways the new cloud system is helping the team at Middlesbrough Council.

Victoria explains the difference it has made for building managers: "They can now log on from anywhere and see up-to-date information on their building: it empowers them to take control of what's happening there. Some buildings may have 10 inspections every quarter: the building manager no longer needs to call the central team to get the relevant info." With everything accessible in one place, both internal and external teams can see the full picture of an asset.

Less waste and risk

Lindsey says this is a huge time-saver. "It just switched off a lot of waste in resources. Instead of requesting documents, printing them out and filing them where they can quickly go out of date, they can review the documents online and in person with an assessor. In the past, we had health and safety surveys failing because the person onsite didn't have the document they needed: that's all gone because of the cloud." For highly regulated areas like asbestos, this accessibility of up-to-date information is especially valuable. Overall, as Lindsey says, "from a compliance point of view, the move to cloud has created a really good framework for how we manage and think about data – it de-risks what we do."

Continuity during Covid

As it was in place before the pandemic, the cloud solution meant there was minimal disruption to the Council's Property and Commercial Services team. Lindsey explains: "The way we worked with our building and maintenance teams didn't falter.

There was no need to come into an office, no need to print, and we could send out jobs on a mobile app." And unlike the previous on-premise system, there's no downtime or disruption for changes and upgrades.

Mobile working

Working with the DLO teams has been transformed, with timesheets calculated automatically and in real-time, and jobs allocated via the app. Lindsey cautions that it takes time for this change to bed in, but it's well worth the effort. "It turns the old-fashioned way of working upside down and not everyone likes it at first. But now everyone has bought into the new mobile way of working, it's a massive positive."

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