

Experienced OnDemand staff give Bath & NE Somerset Council flexibility and expertise

Civica's OnDemand Resource was a better solution to staffing needs than permanent hires



Budgetary pressures and structural changes presented the benefits team with major challenges.

In early 2015, Bath and North East Somerset Council's benefits staff needed to release some officers from front line duties to work on the FERIS fraud reduction initiative, meaning that additional resources were needed to provide cover. But taking on new permanent staff was not an option.

Like all councils, Bath's budgets are under pressure and the rapidly changing welfare environment further complicated things. The council will be one of the first to move over to Universal Credit, meaning that benefit caseloads could fall by 50%. Consequently, the expense of hiring and training new permanent staff can't be justified.

Roy Cafferky, Telephony Operations Manager, Customer Services at Bath and North East Somerset Council, says that they considered taking people on fixed term contracts but struggled to find anybody with experience. The special skills required make it impractical to train up inexperienced personnel quickly.

The solution: Civica's flexible OnDemand service

So in April 2015, Roy engaged Civica's OnDemand service, starting with two full time equivalent staff to back-fill for the re-assigned benefits officers.

Getting internal approval for OnDemand was "relatively easy because we were so assured about the quality of the product" says Roy. It helped that "Civica sourced some very good quality officers - that was the deal-breaker." The council recognised that hiring inexperienced staff would be a false economy because of the stiff penalties for breaching error thresholds. Roy says that: "If standards had dropped we'd have ended up losing more money through subsidy payments." Civica's history of doing similar work with other local authorities was an important comfort factor.

Implementation was straightforward. OnDemand staff simply had to be made aware of a few idiosyncrasies in the Bath processes, which was quick and easy. Their knowledge of the Northgate interface was critical for Roy: "Because of their familiarity with Northgate, by the end of day two everything was pretty much ironed out."

"Civica came with a certain cachet. Their experience meant that there were no questions over their capability. It was taken for granted that they'd be able to deliver."

Roy Cafferky, Telephony Operations Manager, Customer Services at Bath and North East Somerset Council

"If someone is inexperienced, you need several years for them to become super competent. We also needed people who could hit the ground running with the Northgate system."

Roy Cafferky, Telephony Operations Manager
Customer Services at Bath and North East
Somerset Council

Bath & North East
Somerset Council



Avoid costs
of recruiting

The benefits

- ▶ Instant access to highly trained personnel experienced in the Northgate system
- ▶ Flexibility to quickly adjust to changing staffing requirements
- ▶ Avoids the costs of recruiting and potentially dismissing permanent staff
- ▶ No need for hand-holding or time-consuming training thanks to consistency of staff
- ▶ Input from experienced OnDemand staff on potential system improvements
- ▶ Quick and easy OJEU compliant frameworks available to satisfy procurement

OnDemand has delivered high quality work for Bath

Bath's requirements for OnDemand were clear: cover personnel gaps by delivering a flexible service through knowledgeable, efficient staff. Roy is very happy to say Civica has delivered thanks to the OnDemand staff's experience with the underlying system. As Roy says, **"The fact that they came in very familiar with Northgate was of massive benefit."**

That has been reflected in the service quality. **"We were really impressed with the quality of their work. Civica really pulled out the stops to make sure we had experienced, capable people and that was very much reflected in the work they did for us."**

And the gains have extended beyond the core benefits processing work. The experience which the OnDemand staff have from working at other councils has been passed on to Bath. As Roy says, **"They provided good feedback on our processes, allowing us to make them more efficient. So we'll continue to benefit from those more refined processes."**

Consistency has been another plus. The staff allocated to Bath have remained constant, meaning that Roy hasn't had to deal with new individuals unfamiliar with the council. **"We haven't had to constantly reboot, which can be a concern. It was very helpful not having to re-tread old ground."**

In summary, Roy says that: **"It's gone very, very well. We've been very impressed with the quality of the work. And the individuals have been personable, amiable and very responsive to our needs."**

While it's tough to put a monetary value on the benefits delivered by OnDemand, they are real.

The officers freed up from benefits duties have delivered the FERIS grants, boosting revenue. Avoiding experienced

members of staff being tied up training new people has boosted productivity. The year-end errors bill should also be minimised thanks to the expertise of the OnDemand staff. And finally, Roy believes that the additional resources will help the move to Universal Credit. A sloppy transition would rebound on the council financially, for example in the form of Discretionary Housing Payments.

A greater role for OnDemand in the future

Roy expects that Bath and NE Somerset will be making increasing use of Civica's OnDemand services, especially at peak times such as annual billing **"Right across customer services it makes a lot of financial sense to look beyond the initial costs. The return on the up-front investment is considerable."**

"I wouldn't hesitate at all to recommend Civica in general and OnDemand specifically given how fast things are changing in the local authority world. It makes a lot of financial sense to look beyond the initial costs. The return on the up-front investment is considerable."

Roy Cafferky, Telephony Operations Manager
Customer Services at Bath and North East
Somerset Council

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Somerset Council



Experienced staff
sharing knowledge