

Saffron helps Lancashire County Council transform catering operations

Improving sustainability and visibility across nearly 550 sites

Introducing Civica Saffron catering management software has helped Lancashire County Council (LCC) to identify and address inefficiencies, boost productivity and increase transparency in school kitchens.

The paperless system brings together all aspects of catering management into a holistic platform for complete visibility, with individual site reporting for enhanced performance monitoring and quicker response times. It has helped to transform operations across nearly 550 sites, removing paper-based processes and centralising regulatory compliance.

Overcoming challenges

Responsible for the delivery of approximately 65,000 meals per day across 492 primary schools, 29 secondary schools and 23 care facilities, LCC runs a significant cost sector catering service which puts the health and wellbeing of children and young people first.

Nigel Craine, Head of Schools & Residential Care Catering at LCC, was tasked with sourcing a new system for the complex catering operation. He said:

"The previous system simply wasn't suitable for our operational catering needs, it would have put the business at risk in terms of efficiency,

spend and lack of top down visibility of the whole operation within one management system. A catering organisation of this scale is incredibly complex – and LCC is even more complex than most. We have to balance the health and wellbeing of more than 118,000 customers with the commercial realities of managing vast supply chains and more than 2,000 staff.

"All this, whilst taking into account our focus on the strategic development of the local food supply chain. We place a large emphasis on the quality of the food we source, not only for the wellbeing of children and young people but to support local economies too. For every £1 received through schools, LCC looks to reinvest into the local economy by purchasing quality food from local growers, producers and supplier, many of whom also purchase from local suppliers, who in turn employ local people who contribute to the local economy."

Introducing a new solution

Nigel needed a solution that would meet LCC's wellbeing, commercial and sustainability objectives. After researching and market testing options for cost-sector catering, he turned to Civica Saffron catering management software.

Key outcomes:

- 1 | Immediate savings of £65,000 a year by removing paper costs
- 2 | Better tracking of regulatory compliance through centralisation
- 3 | Clear reporting of food costs to track over and under-spends

"Saffron gives us the consistency we need around food production, cost allowances, ingredients and allergens, while the real-time reporting functionality gives us greater visibility of uptake."

Nigel Craine, Head of Schools & Residential Care Catering, Lancashire County Council

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Saffron brings together the individual elements of the catering operation to ensure efficiency, improve profitability and maintain safety and compliance, all in one central cloud-based repository. It drives cost savings too, with iOS and Android tablet interfaces removing up to 70% of the associated costs of a paper-based system.

“Our work with Saffron and local food suppliers helps us to improve the health and wellbeing of young people in Lancashire and we’re incredibly proud to be in that position. Our long-term relationship with Civica continues to grow and strengthen, and I believe this is key in the continued success of our catering operation.”

Nigel Craine, Head of Schools and Residential Care Catering, Lancashire County Council

Nigel adds: “I was impressed by the quality of the system, together with the can-do attitude of the team and the contract management support on offer. The return on investment was appealing too. We were aware that this new system would need to be rolled out across 492 primary schools and 29 secondary schools. In total, we invested in 485 tablets to input information and around 1,000 licenses, so it was vitally important to make the right decision.”

In addition to the main Saffron platform, schools have the option to use cashless POS systems including Civica Cashless. This provides sites with integrated functionality to run cashless catering operations for detailed

analytics, streamlined mealtimes and better management of free school meals.

LCC takes advantage of additional modules including Saffron Check, which captures aspects such as food/fridge temperatures and completion of documents to support HACCP compliance, and Saffron Menu, which improves menu planning to maintain nutrition and maximise profitability.

Achieving efficiencies

Now in place for over a decade, Civica Saffron delivers a wide range of benefits to LCC and the individual kitchens at schools across the county.

Nigel adds: “One of the biggest challenges for us is having a published, compliant menu range which can be adapted to meet individual school needs and the needs of local communities, in line with Department for Education guidance. We need to maintain compliance in an efficient way too, at a time when the influence of legislation is becoming unwieldy to the point where it could impact customer experience.

“Civica Saffron enables us to do all of that whilst supporting our strategic goals. Saffron Menu gives us the consistency we need around food production, cost allowances, ingredients and allergens, while the real-time reporting functionality gives us greater visibility of uptakes, for example free school meals.”

Cost savings were achieved immediately by reducing the need for schools to print documents such as annual stationery packs, which cost around £45,000 each year, and menu production packs, saving around £20,000 each year. Eliminating paper records also drives environmental benefits and reduces the risk of lost data, allows management to monitor performance remotely and in real time, and helps the council react to non-compliances far

quicker. The centralisation of compliance data also allows LCC to share this with their Primary Authority Partner, allowing overview and scrutiny of compliance in real time.

The ability to measure performance at an individual kitchen level has also benefited LCC in multiple ways. Identification of food purchases and consumption on an individual site basis allows for clear reporting of food costs to track over and under-spends, taking into account that an increase of 1p per meal costs the authority around £120,000 per year. Productivity KPIs by a number of reporting criteria allow for targeted intervention within each kitchen if required. This has already assisted in supporting a continued year on year rise in productivity.

In addition, Civica Saffron supported LCC’s COVID-19 compliance throughout the pandemic, allowing for swift communication of COVID-secure measures and real-time updates through the in-app messaging functionality.

LCC is also moving to online ordering for over 80% of products, a time and cost-saving process made possible by the Saffron Purchasing module.

Achieving compliance

Nigel adds: “Civica Saffron allows LCC to be progressive in developing the business in line with strategic and regulatory changes and communicate these consistently across a large portfolio of sites. This ensures that all schools are able to reference and operate against one holistic system which can be administrated and updated in real time.



“It also allows us to track legal compliance in one central resource and share this with regulating bodies, both now and in the future. The introduction of Natasha’s Law and changes brought about by the Food Standards Agency Regulating Our Future initiative, for example, will bring about new requirements for food producers, and Saffron gives us the ability to capture all data in a consolidated manner.

“Ultimately, this level of detail allows for the success of our operations to be reported in the context of what we do and not just as a financial overview. This ensures that management teams can be communicated to consistently on how their individual schools are performing and how the organisation performs as a whole. It ensures a high level of engagement, working together to enhance contract performance and retention.

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