Central Coast Council streamlines accounting process
with Civica's Authority Financial Solutions

The former Gosford City Council, (now part of Central Coast Council in NSW) can respond more quickly to residents' changing needs after streamlining their key accounting processes by restructuring the General Ledger.

Council transactions related to the delivery of council services and operations are recorded on the General Ledger (GL), including financial information from subsidiary ledgers, such as accounts receivable/payable, rates income and assets.

The General Ledger provides council with rolling totals of expenditure, and it is critical to the generation of budgeting and financial reporting.

Council partnered with Civica to implement the project, which saved time and money, previously spent on collecting and analysing data from a variety of sources.

A key outcome of the project, titled The General Ledger Restructure, was that it allowed council officers to make more informed and rapid decisions on funding projects, including faster reporting on the total cost of services, financial statements and budgets.

Council is responsible for maintaining and developing new services on the NSW Central Coast that includes large sections of state forest, national parks, nature reserves, beaches and waterways. In 2015, the former Gosford City Council funded more than $300 million in local projects – including the provision of roads, waste water, environmental and recreational services.

"The streamlining of accounting structures was critical to the delivery of services to residents. The General Ledger Restructure came as part of a drive for greater efficiency and value to our community. We chose to not only structure our accounts around our specific services, but also to have two other hierarchies of organisation structure and financial reporting requirements to ensure that information is accessible and easy to produce for everyone who needs it."

Janine McKenzie
Executive Manager
Transition & Business Performance
Central Coast Council

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The makings of a successful project

Establishing the need

Like many other local government organisations, Gosford City Council's general ledger was built up over many years to become a large number of accounts with little structure or consistency.

What Council needed, was a solution for the general ledger structure that would allow it to easily report financial information to all stakeholders in real-time without accountants having to manually sift through vast data sets. Prior to undertaking the project with Civica to restructure its GL Council would reconcile the general ledger with subsidiary ledgers manually each month. This manual approach also required extensive training and supervision of employees to ensure the ledgers were adequately maintained.

Central Coast Council's new Executive Manager of Transition and Business Performance (and the former Gosford City Council's Executive Manager of Performance and Strategy) Janine McKenzie said the streamlining of accounting structures was critical to the delivery of services to residents.

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Project rollout

Council chose the Civica Authority's Business Intelligence (BIS) reporting tool to allow data to be analysed from across the organisation, provide almost real time reporting of its financial position, and reduce operational costs and administration time.

As part of the project rollout, Civica worked with key finance staff to restructure accounting reporting approaches – such as the way data for balance sheets, operating sheets and other financial reports was collected and reported.

Civica's Authority Enterprise solution is used by more than 180 local governments throughout Australia and New Zealand. The General Ledger module is part of Authority's Financial Applications is one of more than 40 business software modules that delivers a single, integrated solution for the running of council systems.

The solution is designed specifically for local government and the inherent single database design eliminates duplication of data throughout the enterprise application. This delivers real time processing of transactional information, providing accurate and timely data that enables informed decision making.

Powerful financial decision making

The Civica Authority Financial Applications help councils meet stringent accounting and audit requirements, but also the practical realities of day-to-day local government management by incorporating core accounting, budgeting and reporting functionality.

Using data from the Central Ledger, councils can create, adjust and review budgets, as well as track specific general ledgers. It also provides a tighter relationship between the General Ledger and Control Accounts.

The streamlined system also helps councils evaluate and allocate financial resources for unexpected events.

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Keeping data safe

As one of the council's most important financial documents, Gosford worked with Civica specialists to ensure the security of the general and subsidiary ledgers was implemented at both the hardware and software levels.

Initial access to the system is restricted by individual user code and password, with access to full application functionality restricted to the Council's accounting employees. These employees have full access to the general ledger module and can perform enquiry, reporting, data entry, processing and maintenance of financial records.

Other employees are restricted to enquiry and reporting access only, ensuring that the data is not tampered with or lost.

The Authority Financial application also maintains audit logs which track all changes to information in the general ledger. In addition, a comprehensive system of data backups and system redundancy mean that recovery from either a system failure or potential disaster situation can always be performed.

Reduced administration and reporting

Despite using the Authority Financial Application for 20 years, prior to the General Ledger Restructure project, the former Gosford City Council didn't have a consistent financial reporting structure, meaning that different parts of the organisation classified the same or similar information in a variety of ways. This meant that for every report, accountants needed to download data into spreadsheets and manually update to ensure the information was accurate and consistent. As a result, finalising reports would take a vast amount of time, while the senior management team also spent a significant amount of time checking for discrepancies in the old general ledger.

With the project, managers are able to view financial information at any time through Civica's BIS tool without having to make a formal request with the finance team. Moreover, this allows finance to focus on tasks which will add value, such as providing insights and advice to managers regarding fund allocation.

Integrated approach

Together, the Authority BIS application and Authority General Ledger module provides powerful and flexible tools for financial control.

The modules can be linked to Debtors and Creditors modules, which automate invoicing, collection processes and creditor transactions; and a purchasing system for purchase - requirement - to - payment processing including e-procurement with support for e-hubs and website punch-out.

The applications are built on Civica's existing software platform and provide a comprehensive set of analysis and reporting tools to ensure that information is delivered quickly and reliably.

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The benefits

▶ **Powerful financial decision making -** Using data from the Central Ledger, councils can create, adjust and review budgets, as well as track specific general ledgers. It also provides a tighter relationship between the General Ledger and Control Accounts.

▶ **Integrated approach -** Together, the Authority BIS application and Authority General Ledger module provides powerful and flexible tools for financial control.

▶ **Reduced administration & reporting - ,** managers are able to view financial information at any time through Civica's BIS tool without having to make a formal request with the finance team. Moreover, this allows finance to focus on tasks which will add value, such as providing insights and advice to managers regarding fund allocation.

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Summary

The project will help develop a consistent accounting structure focused on service delivery, which will enable staff to make more informed decisions based on up-to-date financial information.

Council's Ms McKenzie said the Civica General Ledger module has delivered improved financial transparency, improved compliance and enhanced accounting efficiency.

"The General Ledger Restructure program with Civica has helped us deliver important financial information in a timely and safe manner," Ms McKenzie said.

"The needs of our residents are constantly changing and becoming increasingly complex. The Civica Authority Financial solution has been tried and tested with hundreds of councils around the world. With the General Ledger Restructure program now completed, we can make better informed decisions based on highly accurate data."

In May, after the amalgamations' project announcement for NSW's councils, Gosford City Council became Central Coast Council. However, Civica and Gosford City Council completed this project prior to the council merger.

Why Civica?

People
Knowledge, integrity and action are the values we live by - it's the **people of Civica and our culture** that really sets us apart

Heritage
Civica has a heritage steeped in helping organisations deliver **operational and process efficiencies**

Expertise
We have an unprecedented level of experience. Our **expertise and proven capability** continues to deliver customer success

Trusted Partner
We are a trusted partner with almost **300 customers in Australia and New Zealand** using our digital solutions