

See how the LGBCE are using Aqilla to effectively allocate costs and improve transparency across the Commission.

CASE STUDY



How the Local Government Boundary Commission for England Use Aqilla To Improve Transparency.

In 2015, the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) identified a need to improve unit costing. In the light of continuing budget cuts and in a drive to improve transparency, the Commission wanted to allocate all costs to individual projects. Simultaneously, it was decided the Commission would move to a cloud-based infrastructure.

With an office relocation imminent, it was also time to move away from their outsourced back office arrangements and implement their own accounting system. The project team implemented cloud-based accounting software Aqilla, allowing the LGBCE to take on full responsibility for its financial information.

The Need for Change

Prior to April 2015, the LGBCE had been 'bolted on' to a large, government outsourced contract which used Agresso software for accounting; a system with more functionality than the team needed and an arrangement which meant they had little control over the accounting and reporting processes.

Karen Cleverly, LGBCE's lead on the finance implementation said, "We wanted a system which we could configure for our specific and changing needs. The arrangement we had didn't give us this flexibility."

Aqilla Is Chosen Over Sage

Karen sought advice from an experienced CIPFA accountant who helped define their system requirements. Once agreed, the search began to find the right solution and Aqilla was shortlisted alongside Sage.

Karen said, "We weren't convinced that an off-the-shelf system such as Sage would have given us either the level of attention or the amount of tailoring which Aqilla has provided. We feel we made the right decision."

Customising Aqilla To Meet Requirements

Aqilla was awarded the contract in March and a slim but functional system was live in April.

Mike Evans, Aqilla's implementation consultant said, *"It was important to make the system feel relevant for the users so we began by making simple customisations to the screens – we renamed fields with familiar terms and removed features that were never going to be used such as multi-currency and VAT."*

"One of the most important parts of the implementation was in customising Aqilla to reflect the LGBCE's authorisation matrix. Aqilla had to be configured to permit or prevent access to certain users at various levels."

Audited in the same way as a Central Government Department, the LGBCE's accounting information is under considerable scrutiny. The process for authorisation is relatively complex for a small operation. The LGBCE also adopts Central Government's transparency policy and makes all expenditure over £500 publicly available. It is vital that the system is able to record this information accurately and report it in a meaningful way.

After the initial launch involving only the four main users, the team was soon able to roll out Aqilla to other members of staff and its Commissioners, who required access from locations across England.

Summing Up

Having successfully implemented Aqilla in a relatively short time frame, Karen and the team continue to make improvements. More training on Sharperlight is planned to generate a greater level of intelligence from the Finance department's data.

The role of the Commissioner is to lead reviews of electoral arrangements for local authorities. Each Commissioner is able to upload their own expenses and Aqilla is configured to allow all transactions to be allocated to the correct Review. Additionally, the LGBCE team has been using Aqilla's Business Intelligence software partner Sharperlight to provide tailored reports.

Support & Development

At the same time, the LGBCE brought a number of functions back in house. **Karen reports**, *"Out of all of the operations going through this process, Finance has had the fewest hiccups, probably because Aqilla is so easy to use and the support team has been very helpful. Aqilla has been really responsive to us in a way that I don't think we would get from anyone else. Although we have quite complex needs, we are still a very small organisation."*

Regarding Aqilla's approach to development, **Karen explains**, *"Small improvements, often put forward by customers like us, are circulated to the entire community for everyone's benefit. This process is continuous so the software is always evolving."*

"Aqilla has been really responsive to us in a way that I don't think we would get from anyone else."