EQUINITI

Helping collect the rates in Northern Ireland

Equiniti provided LPS with a comprehensive and easy-to-use rate collection system to improve business operations and service provision whilst handling complex business processes. In addition to developing the system, Equiniti also provides a complete managed business process service.

Land and Property Services (LPS) partnered with Equiniti to implement a fully managed service and customised rate collection system that was adaptable and scalable to deal with frequent changes in legislation and rate reforms and process the high volumes of data associated with Northern Ireland property taxation. They manage the tax on over 900,000 properties and 700,000 ratepayers which equates to £1.2 billion in revenue and generates over ten million financial transactions each year.

Challenges

Significant changes to the rating system had led LPS's rate collection software to be outdated and inflexible. The agency's system was heavily customised and was unable to adapt to future changes and meet the new requirements of rating reforms.

LPS required a modern solution that was adaptable and scalable to deal with such changes, but also integrated with the business functions across the organisation.

The solution would also need to significantly improve overall business operations and service provision whilst handling complicated business processes.

A key element of the requirement was the ability to manage LPS's high volume of data and provide full management information systems along with data mining tools to allow rapid response to the numerous ad hoc data requests from both public and politicians. In addition, the system needed to be able to review and process re-assessments on data from over the last ten years.

Solution

Equiniti implemented a customised, fully managed suite of software and associated services to help LPS to comply with the latest legislation, whilst enabling the agency to rapidly respond to legislative changes which may occur in the future.

The service incorporated complex assessment and collection software, a sophisticated accounts package, workflow, business intelligence software, security administration, disaster recovery, and on-going technical and application support.

In addition to the management information software accessing various data cubes, the solution included ad-hoc query and reporting tools for rapid interrogation of data to answer parliamentary questions and queries from politicians, the media and general public.

The new solution complies fully with current legislative requirements of the service (including: rate relief, lone pensioner allowance, education, training and leaving care allowance, small business rate relief, large retail levy) and meets stringent service and security standards.

The back-end database currently holds over 80 million financial transactions with a current total of over 1.5 TB of data in the live database alone. The system also includes multiple environments with full datasets for training and testing.

The system is hosted at Equiniti's secure data centre, supported by full disaster recovery provision to ensure system availability at all times.

There is a managed service team of five persons (3.5 full time employees) looking after the daily operational duties and a further team of 11 people working on new development and software and technical support of the full system.

As part of the managed service, Equiniti provides the printing of all rates bills, reminders and enforcement notices from its secure print facility producing in excess of one million documents per annum for LPS. Equiniti also provided data tracing and forensic data analysis services to assist LPS deal with the task of tracing unpaid debtors.

Direct debit facilitation

Equiniti facilitated the calculation and reconciliation of direct debits as well as completing the direct debit mandate.

Debtor tracing service

LPS needed to trace a large number of records on its database for which it had incomplete or missing information. Equiniti verified and traced 84.5% of end-dated accounts with outstanding debt, helping LPS to generate new rate demands to 27,478 properties equating to £13.5 million in new revenue. This service has enabled LPS to meet its debt reduction targets and helped it to identify and write off uncollectable debt. The debt tracing software gave LPS access to:

- Current occupier data
- Entry and exit dates to and from each property
- Commercial intelligence appended to account
- Telephone numbers at current residency principal company registration data

About Land and Property Services

Land and Property Services brings together the former Rate Collection Agency, the Valuation and Lands Agency, the Land Registry of Northern Ireland, and Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland.

The agency collects rates on 900,000 properties in Northern Ireland generating revenues in the order of £1.2 billion per annum. It also administers many benefits and reliefs including the Housing Benefit Scheme and the Disabled Persons

Allowance Scheme dealing with some 65,000 Housing Benefit and 8,000 Disabled Persons Allowance scheme claimants.

Key Benefits to LPS

- Automates existing processes and improves efficiencies, ensuring an enhanced public service provision
- Modernises the existing legacy system to improve overall business operations
- Provides flexibility to comply with current and future legislative requirements
- Gives access to a future-proof solution and a strong development team for on-going changes
- Minimises disruption to business operation and provides peace of mind with a full outsourced managed service
- Ensures that the system is always up-to-date with the latest technology
- Integrated system managing all aspects of LPS rates
- Provides full accounting controls interfaces with other government agencies and financial institutions and provides output for Northern Ireland government audit and statistics departments
- Provides data query, data analysis and data mining capabilities for high volumes of information
- Provides a fully integrated printing solution for all outbound communication
- Enables LPS to identify and investigate fraud around unpaid rates

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The fully integrated system replaces several disparate systems allowing LPS to handle the additional business complexity resulting from a substantial programme of rating reforms and significant organisational change. The solution from Equiniti has ensured that we have continued to maintain an operational service in very challenging times."

ANNE JOHNSTON,
PROGRAMME MANAGER, LPS

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