

Council speeds up budgeting, gains flexible reporting and long term planning

Greater Taree City Council (GTCC) is responsible for serving the Manning Valley, a regional area of NSW covering 3,753 square kilometres on predominantly rural landscape with residential, industrial and commercial use and is home to 48,000 people.

Being a council, it has multifaceted roles and responsibilities across building services, community wellbeing, cultural services, development services, economic development, environmental health, infrastructure & engineering, strategic planning/environmental management, and tourism.

The council strives for improvements in delivering community outcomes and its executive team has been at the forefront of driving accountability and performance improvements through the organisation.



Local Government Planning and Reporting Framework

GTCC was a 'group one' council under the new Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) Framework implemented by the NSW State Government. This meant that GTCC was required to implement the IP&R from July 2010, which in turn meant developing a range of programs and plans including a long term financial plan. The aim of the implementation of the IP&R framework was to improve sustainability and long term planning for NSW councils.

On this basis GTCC needed to improve reporting and planning systems and processes to enable it to better deliver on outcomes and importantly plan, report and act. Craig Swift-McNair, Executive Leader Resource Planning engaged Professional Advantage to run a workshop with the council leadership team.

Solution Snapshot

Solution

- Infor ION BI - Performance Management & Import Master ETL utility
- Budget, Forecasting, Dashboards and Reporting

Benefits

- Single platform for 4 year rolling budgets, forecasting, performance reporting, dashboards and analysis
- Structures and hierarchies directly transformed from finance system, no maintenance
- Reduced budget administration, 4 months down to 1 month
- Improved data integrity by eliminating spreadsheets
- Budget preparation down from 2 weeks to 1 day
- Monthly reporting distribution down from 1 day to zero self service
- Copy, import, forecast and export wizards providing 90% productivity efficiencies and eliminating risk of error
- Strong business adoption and feedback
- Ability to meet multiple reporting and regulatory needs concurrently
- Ability to report and examine performance from council, departmental, function to program and project levels with drill to transactions

Objectives included:

- to provide greater transparency and accountability, to council and the community
- to better understand the drivers for core business functions
- to have systems with strong user adoption and to get buy-in and improve budget ownership
- to improve short & long term planning; to move to more rolling forecasts with short, medium and long-term outlooks
- to move towards full Performance Management incorporating all aspects of performance including financial and non-financial measures

"Infor ION BI - Performance Management has become a key driver of better financial governance within Greater Taree City Council." - Executive Leader, Resource Planning



The result was the recommendation and rapid implementation of Infor ION BI as the platform for GTCC. This would allow GTCC to move beyond just an annual budget process to quarterly and monthly reporting and forecasting. This will ultimately assist council to meet its wider planning and performance needs.

Swift-McNair adds, "In relation to our Infor ION BI - Performance Management implementation, the entire process has been very successful from our perspective.

"In the first instance the investigation and mapping process prior to implementation made us critically review the budgeting process that was currently in place, with a view to developing something much more robust and user-friendly than spreadsheets.

"Past budgeting regimes were significantly onerous and time consuming. For example, GTCC undertakes an annual budget development process and historically that has taken at least four to five months to complete. Professional Advantage went from a standing start in October 2011 to being live with budgeting and forecasting in November 2011. All our managers have, for the first time in our history, been able to directly enter their budgets into the system. From an executive management point of view, we have been able to view all our managers' budgets in the one location and check for variances and run various dashboard reports, etc.

Managers have been very positive with their feedback on the new budgeting process: "It gives me greater control and understanding of the structure of my budget and allows me to design the budget to suit my business needs."

"The system is easy to use and provides me with confidence that the end product (i.e. budget) is what I entered and prepared, meaning that I am not reliant on others to enter my budget data into various spreadsheets, etc."

Swift-McNair adds "Another first for GTCC was that the entire management team met within two weeks of our first draft budgets being entered into the system, with the aim of reviewing all the 2012-2013 draft budgets. Infor BI was projected live so we could discuss various budget issues from a strategic organisational viewpoint as the senior management team. This really encourages budget ownership across each section of the organisation.

"Infor ION BI has already transformed the way we do budgeting at GTCC and in the coming months, once we refine our reporting requirements, we will no longer need to rely on various systems and

spreadsheets to undertake our budget development."

"What's impressive is that we actually managed to introduce the system while completing an annual budget cycle. We even brought forward future phases including capital and salary & wage planning. Obviously timelines for approval are dependent on council but the effort involved in the development of the budgets has disappeared. We now have our managers taking direct control over the development of their budgets, which has allowed us to focus more appropriately on the quality of our budget decision making.

"As a result of the implementation of Infor ION BI - Performance Management, the councillors will have access to more detailed budget reporting than has even been available, which is a critical issues throughout the budget development process. This in turns means that more meaningful budget data can be provided to the community.

"With all budgets being developed in the Infor ION BI - Performance Management system, the updating of our ten year long term financial plan (LTFF) is considerably more automated in that we can take the data directly from the Infor system and feed it into the LTFF modelling to produce forward financial plans.

"Infor ION BI - Performance Management more than met expectations. Our future plans are to continue to streamline our budgeting process through the use of Infor ION BI and to not only use the system for budget development purposes but for ongoing budget management, where managers complete monthly and quarterly budget reviews in the system so that we can easily report on budget variances as the year progresses."

About Professional Advantage

Professional Advantage focuses on providing technology and services that enable high-performance workplaces and organisations. Professional Advantage was established in 1989 and today employs more than 230 people in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, London and Fargo, USA. The company is the largest provider of leading brand global business management systems such as financial management, ERP, CRM, retail, business intelligence, business process management and portal solutions to mid-sized organisations in Australia, supporting over 800 clients nationally. Its multi-product offering is complemented by its development, systems integration, consulting, training, and support services. Professional Advantage is the winner of many business and vendor awards including the Microsoft President's Club 2011 and the 2012 Asia Pacific Partner of the Year Award for Infor.