

# **Suffolk Coastal Port Health Authority – Felixstowe**

## **Summary**

41 per cent of food imported to the UK comes through the port of Felixstowe. Suffolk Coastal Port Health Authority (SCPHA) is responsible for checking the products. In 2008, it was using a 15 year old IT system that was inhibiting the effectiveness of the organisation. Port Health replaced this outdated system with a new information management system (IMS) that was developed in house and which significantly improved effectiveness and generated savings.

## **Objectives**

The IT system that the council had been using was built using technology that could no longer be supported, and as a result posed a risk to the council. It was becoming increasingly difficult to support, and lacked much of the functionality required for the service to operate efficiently. With the volume of trade continuing to grow, it seemed unlikely the system could continue to meet demand, resulting in delays to imports and hampering the growth of the Port. It was estimated that SCPHA would need 15 new members of staff to cope with the additional demand for its services of monitoring all food imports if the existing ICT system was not replaced.

SCPHA decided to replace the system with an advanced market-leading Information Management System (IMS) that met the current and foreseeable business needs of the service, thereby enabling the Council to offer an improved and more efficient service to food importers.

The core aims of this project were to:

- Enhance operational efficiency
- Enhance operational effectiveness
- Improve business efficiency by deploying an integrated IT application
- Avoid the projected staff growth
- Provide better service for businesses

## **Approach**

SCPHA conducted extensive research but could not find an appropriate replacement IT system that fully met their needs – with a wide range of different foods imported into Felixstowe, the system would have to process high volumes and numbers of processes and legislation. SCPHA decided to develop a replacement in house, using resources seconded from the Council's ICT department.

The project was run with external project management assistance, and extensive user involvement, e.g. through 'show and tell' Rapid Applications Development (RAD) workshops. This aided the speedy development of the project, without the bureaucracy and problems associated with many large public-sector projects.

Part of their approach was to directly involve those at the sharp end, those who were operating the current paper-heavy system. This was to ensure that the new system met their needs and was designed in a way that they could use easily, and with the scope for further improvements for other key tasks in the future.

The first phase of the new ICT system, called PHILIS (Port Health Interactive Live Information System), went live in the autumn of 2009.

## **Outcomes**

PHILIS has achieved its initial stated objectives, and has been embraced by all users, providing a single comprehensive system.

PHILIS has enabled SCPHA to continue to deliver a high quality, highly technical and complex service within a growing market. In addition PHILIS has brought greater consistency, removed the need for multiple data entry, and assists staff in the decision making process. The comprehensive nature of PHILIS permits the production of meaningful and replicable management/statistical information for local and national returns.

## **Benefits**

### **Customer benefits**

With 150 food importers registered on PHILIS online system, many importers can now send their forms in electronically. SCPHA is now able to serve food importers quickly and efficiently, even as demand has risen.

"[SCPHA is the] Best in the UK when it comes to Port Health Issues and clearances... You cannot improve any more than you have over the past two years" – customer of SCPHA (agent / importer)

### **Council benefits**

'The PHILIS project has been a real success story for our Port Health Team and Suffolk Coastal District Council and has delivered a market leading piece of software which has driven efficiency in the service with real savings of time and money. With the recent launch of mobile working the system continues to develop and improve for the benefit of our customers and the Port of Felixstowe, ensuring that it remains the port of choice for agents and importers of food into the UK' said Mary Neale, Cabinet Member for Community Health.

SCPHA now has a system that requires less paperwork, both for staff and for food importers themselves. Thanks to the developers working closely with the users, PHILIS is still evolving so that increased legislative and external audits requirements have been met without expanding the staff base.

This means PHILIS has generated productivity gains of up to 22% or annual savings of around 17,000 working hours. The project has been subjected to review by OGC Gateway review by audit (with a copy passed to the Audit Commission), with the benefit realisation analysis showing double-digit savings in staff time. Total savings have amounted to £200,000 a year since it went live in 2009.

Suffolk Coastal Port Health has also started to license the system out to other Port Health Authorities, including Mersey and London, in total generating an extra income of £80,000 a year.

PHILIS has brought other, additional long-term benefits as SCPHA are now using the data that PHILIS provides to predict future workload and try and match resource to peaks in demand for the service.

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