



Enfield Council finds EASY efficiency gains in capturing and processing 70,000 invoices a year electronically

The London Borough of Enfield in north London employs around 11,000 people. Together they look after the whole range of public services, from running local schools and leisure facilities, collecting refuse, caring for the disadvantaged and overseeing the upkeep of libraries, roads, pavements and parks, art galleries and museums, to managing local housing and planning.

Determined that recent public sector austerity measures would not impact frontline services, Enfield Council has worked hard to maximise internal efficiencies, wherever possible making cuts to everyday administrative overheads rather than stripping back public facilities.

To this end, the Council is on a mission to banish slow, repetitive routine processes from its activities, and to eliminate paper wherever possible. Its goal is to automate these processes wherever this reduces costs and adds value – for example by enabling document content to be accessed electronically and shared more readily, and allowing audit trails to be easily created.

SAP integration supports shared services

Over the last three years Enfield has actively deployed electronic document imaging and archiving software from EASY Software. The strategic initiative to streamline core business processes extends across more than one function of the Council, but a particularly transformative deployment of the technology is in its finance department. Here the project involves the scanning, archiving and management of invoices so that they can be logged directly and accessed within Enfield's SAP enterprise resource planning (ERP) system.



Crucially this has supported the Council's transition to a central 'shared service' payment team, making invoice processing much more efficient. Dawn Evans, assistant head of finance at the Council, explains: "We handle around 70,000 invoices each year, and the process of handling these used to be devolved in that each department had its own, different process. As part of a plan to centralise and standardise invoice management we set a goal to eliminate paper."

The shared payment team uses EASY Software's EASY Enterprise for SAP archiving solution to store all of its invoices electronically. Incoming paper invoices are sent to EASY service partner Capital Capture, an external outsourced imaging company. The contents are intelligently scanned using optical character recognition (OCR) technology and the digital contents uploaded for processing to SAP Accounts Payable Workbench within the Council ERP system.

Same-day clearance

Today, the 70,000 procurement/PO-based invoices that

the Council would previously have managed manually are now handled 100% electronically from the point of content capture, eliminating the need for staff to shuffle large volumes of paper.

Five full-time-equivalent members of staff can now cope with this workload and most invoices are cleared on the same day now. "Of the invoices we can clear – ie of those that don't need special treatment – around 60% are cleared on initial posting to SAP," Dawn says. "There are no longer piles of invoices waiting to be posted. All of the information is on the system now. Before, it could be a week's turnaround to get invoices into the system which was inefficient."

As a result of this increased productivity, the Council finds it is fielding far fewer calls from suppliers. "We have more control if and when queries do come in too," she adds. "If a supplier asks why an invoice hasn't been paid, staff no longer have to go off to hunt through a pile of paperwork. They can see immediately whether and when it was posted on the system and advise if there is an issue with the payment."

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Simultaneous & remote access

A significant additional benefit is that more than one person can access the scanned image of the invoice at any one time, so there are no bottlenecks or delays if the accounting team need to see a document, or if copies need to be provided. These can be accessed directly from the central SAP system. "Compared with having to track down the physical copy, this is so much more productive," Dawn notes. "Having the information right there at your fingertips is also a great aid to budget monitoring."

The ability to readily distribute content to approved users also supports the Council's remote- and home-working policy. Enfield actively encourages flexible working, allowing employees to operate from alternative locations and improve their work-life balance.

Enfield is also a highly dispersed organisation and needs to be able to access and share invoice information with schools, libraries and other services it manages. "Two to three years ago, before we had multi-function printer/scanner/copiers, we had to rely on the post and fax to circulate copies of documents; now it's all accessible and easy to share at the touch of a button," Dawn explains.

Plug & play

Of the benefits of using EASY Software's document archiving technology over competitive solutions, Dawn says, "The integration with SAP has been especially valuable. The capability was already in place, so no configuration changes

to our ERP system were needed. It was a simple case of plug and play."

A further benefit not to be downplayed is the freedom from having to physically store paper invoices. The electronic copies captured by EASY Enterprise are tamper-proof, giving them legal standing as documents. "The external scanning service provider keeps the invoices for the required timeframe and destroys the paper originals," Dawn notes. "They have certification to say that the electronic images they keep are of a standard accepted by HMRC, which means we no longer have the worry of maintaining legally accepted records."

Enfield Council's experience of transforming routine activities by digitising paper documents has been so rewarding that its corporate IT team is currently talking to EASY about possible next projects. "Having experienced so many tangible benefits from using EASY's electronic document management software already, it makes sense to look for additional ways we can harness the technology to extend the productivity gains," Dawn concludes. "It fits with our mission to safeguard frontline services by running our internal operations as efficiently as possible."



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www.easysoftware.co.uk Tel: +44 (0)1284 727870



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