

CAMDEN COUNCIL MOVES TOWARDS A SINGLE VIEW OF THE CITIZEN USING JBOSS ENTERPRISE DATA SERVICES FROM RED HAT

FAST FACTS

Industry	Local Government
Geography	United Kingdom
Business Challenge	Camden Council's disparate data silos were restricting the customer service experience for its planning application process
Migration Path	Multiple databases, including: CRM - Lagan frontline; Tagish iCasework - self service e-forms and case management, both available on Oracle 9.2 Framework-i; Social care application, data available on CSV files extracted from the system, and Northgate Housing application, data exposed by Web services provided by supplier
Solution	Camden Council implemented JBoss Enterprise Data Services with the help and guidance of Red Hat Consulting to integrate disparate data silos and greatly enhance the customer experience
Software	JBoss Enterprise Data Services (based on the MetaMatrix technology), JBoss Seam, JBoss Hibernate
Benefits	Reduced project cost by approximately 80 percent, reduced enquiry time by two thirds, and improved customer satisfaction



BACKGROUND

Camden Council covers an area of 22 square kilometres (2,180 hectares) of inner London, north of the West End and City of London. The borough stretches from Hampstead Heath (one of the largest open spaces in the capital) through Camden Town, Euston, and Kings Cross to central London. Parts of central London, such as Holborn, St Giles and Covent Garden, are amongst the capital's most built-up areas.

Camden Council delivers almost 600 different services to approximately 227,500 residents and a daily flow of visitors and commuters, increasing its population threefold.

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To ensure quality of service to the citizen, performance is carefully measured throughout the year to identify under-performing services for improvement. The Council's scrutiny committees play an important role in this as they take regular performance reports and challenge performance where it is not meeting the standards that residents expect.

BUSINESS CHALLENGE

Individual citizens often communicate with multiple areas of the Council simultaneously. For example, due to the nature of planning applications, five different teams within the Council needed to be consulted and in agreement for applications to be approved. This process could prove frustrating and time consuming for residents, and had been identified as an aspect of Council service that could be improved.

Camden Council's objective was to centralise all these enquiries into one contact centre for Planning Licensing and Enforcement (PLE) enquiries. Providing a single view of the citizen would reduce the confusion associated with multiple Council contact points for residents.

While the Council had gone some way to solve this issue by providing a CRM system to Council workers, five different systems were in place, meaning that teams had to log into multiple systems to respond to enquiries. These systems store information in different ways, due to their different nature (relational databases, files, proprietary systems, etc.). This complex process was not only time consuming for staff, as they often had to enter information across multiple systems, but it also contributed to error and compromised the quality of the Council's customer service.

It was clear that the business processes along with the underlying technical infrastructure and data assets needed to be organised in a coherent manner. As with any public sector organisation, cost efficiency, long term viability, minimal maintenance, and low exit costs are key requirements for any project and were at the centre of the decision making and solution assessment process.

SOLUTION

Camden Council evaluated various methods and toolsets to solve this complex challenge. The Council was keen to provision development in house to directly meet its requirements and build internal knowledge about the to-be selected technology for smooth operational transition and future developments.

The ability to leverage the current data assets was also key for the Council. JBoss Enterprise Data Services Platform offered a way to rapidly integrate existing datasets using modelling technology, regardless of the native source of format.

An initial Proof of Concept (PoC) was constructed by Red Hat Consulting within a week of receiving the brief from Camden Council, and its objectives included:

To prove that the JBoss Enterprise Data Services Platform could integrate disparate information silos across the Council (RDBMS, Webservices, CSV files)

To provide the ability for all customer services representatives to be able to interact with the system through a single user interface, with minimal training

To demonstrate the expansion potential and short development cycle such a solution could facilitate

The Council agreed that this PoC was a success and met the critical success factors. The resulting project to roll this model to the newly built Planning Licensing and Enforcement team took just 10 weeks from initiation, and it is currently used in production by the Council.



BENEFITS

Due to the innovative and thriving nature of Camden Council, flexibility and scalability were key requirements for the final solution. Camden has been very satisfied with these aspects of the project, particularly with regards to the user interface. The user interface can now be tweaked and amended for specific user/team requirements without having to chance the underlying data structure, reducing the development cycle.

Key to the success of this project was the close working relationship between Red Hat Global Consulting and Camden Council's internal development team. Through the collaborative nature of the deployment, the development and integration team was able to call upon members of the Red Hat team who had a deep understanding of the project.

"The knowledge transfer that occurred during our site engagement means my internal team knows more about the technology and how to use it effectively. This component added value to our consulting purchase and lasted long after the consultant had left," said Francois Mounier, integration and development manager, corporate ICT, Camden Council.

"As part of our continuous effort to provide better customer focused services, we have successfully used JBoss Enterprise Data Services to build an aggregated view of our siloed customer databases," said Mounier. "With JBoss Enterprise Data Services we were able to create a virtual database without the need to move any data. We are now able to build business focused applications using a single database connection. JBoss Enterprise Data Services can connect to a wide range of data sources, from standard relational databases to non-structured documents, and it can utilise web services, which has allowed us to reuse existing components."

Reduced cost was a crucial metric for success. Camden estimates that the entire project, including training, consultancy, and implementation cost the Council around 20 percent of comparable costs for proprietary systems.

In addition, JBoss Enterprise Data Services proved as a way to develop applications rapidly and more efficiently, offering more flexibility and reusability than alternative methods.

Ultimately the major objective for the project, to provide a better experience for the citizen when dealing with the Council, was met. Customer satisfaction was improved as a single point of contact can now answer most enquiries, and Council representatives have a more complete view of the citizen when answering enquiries.

The time needed to answer enquiries from customers has also been reduced. Camden estimates that it takes around a third of the time, compared to the previous solution. Additionally, Camden's use of JBoss Enterprise Data Services has reduced the amount of training needed for staff. New staff members can now quickly answer most customer questions from one system.

FUTURE

Red Hat and its JBoss division are part of Camden Council's long term IT strategy. In order to meet its objective of providing a single view of the Citizen, other Council departments will be mirroring the planning department's approach. The first departments to address this will be housing repairs and financial services, which will be looking to deploy JBoss Enterprise Data Services from Red Hat in a similar manner.





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