

Manchester rises to the project challenge

Manchester has some of the most exciting development opportunities and programmes in the UK but some of the biggest project delivery challenges with a capital programme of 800 projects worth £250M pa.

Article by Diane Stean, Atkins MC

“Project Managers with no previous experience start 60% of all the projects in the UK.”

So says the brief for Manchester’s initiative to develop project management capability across the City Council. No surprise maybe to many of us involved in the industry but it might go some way to explaining why so many projects seem to go wrong across the UK and especially in Government. However, Manchester City Council (MCC) is doing something about that and is transforming itself into a model of programme and project management excellence. Atkins MC is playing a key part in this with a Project Management Portal that provides a single point of access for on-line practical support for project managers, visibility of programmes and plans and business critical information for decision-making.

It is easy to forget that while Manchester was at the heart of Britain’s prosperity in the Industrial Revolution and has continued to thrive as a centre of business, culture and education, it ranks as a deprived area in UK terms. Manchester is left with a legacy of land and buildings that must be moved out of the industrial age to reinforce its position in the knowledge economy.

As a result, Manchester has some of the most exciting development opportunities and programmes in the UK but some of the biggest project challenges. Like every local authority, MCC has an aggressive programme of eGovernment to transform the way that it interfaces with the citizen, via the internet, telephone and walk-in centres that make all services available through single points of access. MCC has a capital programme of 800 projects worth £250M pa. It is also a partner in one of the country’s largest regeneration programmes, with English Partnerships and the North West Development Agency. Regeneration of New East Manchester will improve 7,000 homes, create 12,500 new dwellings and provide supporting infrastructure, business and leisure facilities across 1,100 hectares. £90M of public funds will be invested alongside larger amounts from private sector developers. In recent years the City has also redeveloped large areas of the centre in response to the 1996 bombing and provided facilities to host the Commonwealth Games.

To help manage these challenges, in 2003 the Chief Executive, Sir Howard Bernstein, launched an initiative to standardise project management delivery across all departments of MCC and the resulting method has received praise from the ODPM (now DCLG) and OGC and attracted interest from a number of other local authorities.

At Atkins MC, we find this project particularly exciting, because it aligns so closely with the values that have driven our work forward for 20 years, implementing best practice in Portfolio, Programme and Project Management on an enterprise basis. The MCC requirement exemplifies the needs of many enterprises in both public and private sectors throughout the UK. Effective delivery of projects critically depends on the sharing of a common set of data across all members of project teams to provide visibility and control, help the team apply consistent best practice and enable collaboration to achieve a common goal.

Time and resources were invested to embed the “Manchester Method”, a standardised framework for project management based on PRINCE2 and the MCC Gateway Process for project scrutiny and approval. The next stage was to apply technology to develop user capability, build capacity and enhance productivity. Specifically:

- Automation of a standard process to reduce user-workload, improve consistency and guide new users in the use of good practice
 - On-line access to reference material, such as the MCC Project Management Handbook, templates and worked examples
 - Risk analysis tools and guidance on how to use them
- Enabling collaboration and sharing information for decision making
 - Learning from corporate experience via a database of “Lessons Learned” on completed and archived projects
 - Programme/Project Bulletin Board for communications and information-sharing
 - Integrated cost-tracking sheets for individual projects

- Automated Red Amber Green status reporting
- Integration with other systems to eliminate duplication and ensure consistency
 - Finance systems
 - GIS / CAD
- Using commodity technology that is consistent with other corporate and desktop systems
 - SharePoint for collaboration is becoming a common standard in many organisations
- Capable of rapid deployment to provide early wins

A particular and important challenge is to provide user-friendly support and information to a broad spectrum of staff from senior executives to novice project managers, that is appropriate to a diverse range of projects from the largest, high value capital construction to product and service delivery in Children, Families and Social Care. This is enabled through the innovative use of Atkins MC and Microsoft technology, including:

- The MS Project Server 2003 and EPM solution for multi-project planning and consolidation
- SQL Analysis Services and SQL Reporting Services
- Windows SharePoint Services for portal functionality
- Atkins MC's own Enterprise Advantage modules to provide Portfolio, Programme and Benefits functionality

All this coupled with a real understanding of what makes a project successful and what users need. The bottom line? For capital projects the MCC business case assessment is that:

"Using collaboration software, a reasonable estimate of savings that can be achieved on construction projects (for improved reporting, document management and drawings) is £37k per £1million contract price."

Do your own sums on how much this might amount to on the MCC programme, but perhaps more important to the public in Manchester is the reassurance that work is focused, projects delivered on time, budget and quality and that their Council tax is being well-spent and for project managers in Manchester City Council, perhaps fewer sleepless nights knowing that it is all under control!

If you would like to know more about how Atkins MC can help you please contact us on **020 7121 2719** or email: mcsolutions@atkinsglobal.com