

LOLA COUNCIL TAX BENEFITS SYSTEM (1993)

Introduction

Phil Brown was the Project Manager for development of the LOLA Council Tax Benefits application with Murali Vidyadharan as Project Leader and Deputy Project Manager. Murali subsequently took over from Phil in 1999.

LOLA Council Tax Benefits System (1993)

Council Tax Benefits system was designed to be an on-line and batch system based on IMS databases, to enable on-line real-time calculations of Council Tax Benefits for Public tenants, Private tenants and owner occupiers. The system was integrated with the LOLA developed Housing Benefits systems. It was also integrated with the IBS Council Tax system chosen by Tower Hamlets by LOLA developing a 2-way interface.

Once the user entered data in the Housing Benefits system and calculated the Housing Benefit, clicking a button calculated the linked Council Tax Benefits without having to re-enter the data in the Council Tax Benefits system. This was a complicated facility to develop but delighted the customers as it saved them significant manpower resource.

The Council Tax Benefits system development commenced in 1992 and was implemented successfully to meet the 1 April 1993 statutory deadline, for Tower Hamlets only which was a major success story for LOLA.

Much credit was due to all LOLA staff involved in the development and also to the boroughs users who co-operated closely with LOLA staff throughout.

The most innovative facility, enabled on-line retrospective calculations of Housing Benefits back to any date in the past, over unlimited multiple Council Tax Benefit history periods.

The main sub-systems comprised:-

1. **On-line suite of transactions** : comprehensive facilities, including maintenance of Council Tax Benefit records, calculation of Council Tax Benefit, applying account adjustments and setting up Council Tax Benefit overpayments recovery.
2. Weekly batch suite : including the production of Benefit letters to claimants automatically generated and posted. Around 80 letter formats existed, depending on the many reasons for Benefit re-calculation.
3. Bulk Mid-Year Council Tax Benefit recalculation suite : comprising Income Up-rating and up-rated Needs Allowances, normally effective in October each year.
4. Bulk Council Tax Benefit re-calculation suite : based on annual Council Tax increases, normally effective from 1st April each year.
5. Weekly 2-way batch interfaces: with the Council Tax system.
6. Normally statutory changes were announced twice a year by the government and these were successfully incorporated into the system

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7. FOCUS – Data analysis

The system created extract files weekly, providing comprehensive data for user interrogation and analysis using the FOCUS database facilities.

Year 2000 changes

The system had to be made Year 2000 compliant. This was a mammoth task as the system was fully date driven. Every program had to be altered and fully retested.

This was successfully completed with no issues found.

Hackney Implementation

Hackney implemented Sx3 Council Tax and Benefits system in 1993. However, a year later they approached LOLA to explore the possibility of implementing the LOLA Council Tax Benefits system for them. This was a complicated feat but LOLA successfully managed to migrate data from Sx3 Benefits system, developed a 2-way interface to the Sx3 Council Tax system and implemented the LOLA Council Tax Benefits system for Hackney in 1995.

However, LOLA lost the Hackney Contract in 1998 to ITNET and as a result Hackney migrated from all LOLA systems subsequently.

Tower Hamlets Contract

LOLA lost the Tower Hamlets contract to ITNET in 2002 and the remaining systems, including Benefits, were supported by ITNET from 1st April 2002 based at Enfield Civic Centre. Bob Humber was in-charge of the Tower Hamlets LOLA systems with Murali Vidhyadhran managing the Benefits system and Paul Williams managing the Rents system. Others TUPEd over were Martin Jackson, Matthew James, David Turvey and Brian Woodayatt.

A web-based Free School Meals system was developed with a 2 way interface to the LOLA Benefits system at the request of Tower Hamlets.

Tower Hamlets subsequently decided to implement Northgate iWorld Rents and Benefits system. ITNET provided the migrated data for upload to the iWorld system and the migration was completed smoothly in 2004.

Summary

LOLA Council Tax Benefits system was an innovative system, developed by a highly skilled and motivated team of LOLA staff which utilised the full capabilities of the IMS database architecture and the PL/1 programming language to create comprehensive user-friendly facilities which fully complied with government legislation.

Murali Vidhyadharan
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