



London Ambulance Service



With 3,400 staff, 390 A&E ambulances, 68 stations and a turnover of £119.5m, London Ambulance Service NHS Trust (LAS) provides an A&E service for the Greater London area, through a service agreement with London's 16 health authorities. It also provides a patient transport service, covering non-urgent out-patient journeys to hospital.

Customer London Ambulance Service	Solutions Attachment Manager	Fixed Assets	Purchase Ordering
Market Sector Health Sector	Budgeting	General Ledger	Sales Ledger
Country United Kingdom	Business Intelligence	ICE	Stock Management
	Cash Management	Invoice Approval	Workflow
	e-Series	Purchase to Pay (P2P)	
		Purchase Ledger	

Introduction

London Ambulance Service is continually under pressure to save money that could be better used for front line services. By working with Capita IB Solutions, the finance department has already made savings and now has access to the financial information that will drive further efficiency gains.

LAS had been using GEAC's Millennium financial management system for nearly ten years and was in the process of negotiating a contract extension, when the computer bureau responsible for the system withdrew its support, giving a year's notice.

Martyn Salter, Deputy Director of Finance at London Ambulance Service, said: "At the time, we were replacing our patient transport system, payroll system and fleet system, so we really didn't want to do the finance system as well, but we were left with no alternative."

The Requirement

LAS formed a project team, with representatives from the finance and IT departments, and appointed a consultant to help write the specification for a new financial management and e-Procurement system. A series of internal workshops were arranged to give all staff in the finance department a chance to influence the specification.

The consensus was for an in-house client/server solution, fully integrated with drill-down features, a Windows-style user interface and an easy-to-use report writer. From an IT viewpoint, LAS was standardising on the NT platform and had a preference for SQL server technology.

The agreed specification was incorporated into an ITT, which generated 41 enquiries and 11 tender responses. These were whittled down to a shortlist of three, based on a comparison of cost, functionality and fit with LAS's IT strategy.

The Solution

Following NHS reference site visits and supplier demonstrations against critical transactions, the six members of LAS's evaluation team went through the pros and cons of the shortlisted systems module by module.

"The vote was unanimous, first time round, for Capita IB Solutions," said Martyn Salter. "They're a reputable company with a proven product and a proven track record. Integra is a very intuitive, easy-to-use system, which was more in tune with what we were looking for, and it gave us good value for money."

Over a five-year operating period, Integra was a marginally more expensive option, but had a better fit against the specification. Martyn Salter says the resultant savings in time afforded by the system justified the higher price.

"Integra had a much better Fixed Assets module than its closest rival," he said. "We have a total fleet of around 900 vehicles, so it's particularly important to keep track of our fixed assets. But other aspects, such as the way Integra handles registered invoices that have not been authorised, were also superior." LAS took a phased approach to implementation. The core phase, which covered General Ledger, Sales Ledger and Purchase Ledger, went live first, followed by Cash Management, Fixed Assets and the e-Procurement modules.

In addition, Capita IB Solutions helped to implement features such as the automatic matching of invoices, the ability to fax remittance advices and the local input of manual cheque requests. LAS also introduced a new journal-upload facility to replace the general ledger interface. This allows journals to be produced on a spreadsheet, so they can be posted to a separate database for validation checks and then posted back to Integra.

The basic system and parameter settings were configured after meetings with the Capita IB Solutions project team and two days of workshops. A prototype system was developed and user training was undertaken, starting with the 30 staff in the finance department. LAS then opened up the system to its 250 budget holders, so they could get answers to basic queries and produce their own financial and budgetary reports.

The Benefits

"Not only is Integra a faster system, it enables us to provide our internal and external customers with a much better and more responsive service," said Martyn Salter. "With our old system, if you wanted to know what requisition caused an order to be raised, or how it related to an invoice, you could only get so far on the system and then you had to look up paper documentation in files.

Now we can simply drill down online through electronically generated transactions, and this reduces paper and our requirement for storage. Because the system is so well integrated, it will cut our processing cycle by around 50 per cent."

Enhanced reporting is another bonus. "The reports from our old system were not user-friendly and we had to re-type data to get it into a spreadsheet," said Martyn Salter. "Now it's easier to produce reports, and they are much easier to read and digest because the layout and appearance are better. As a result, we've significantly improved the quality of information we send to budget holders and the Trust Board."

Integra has also delivered a tangible financial saving. "We've achieved ongoing net savings of £35,000 per annum, predominantly by reducing our bureau charges," said Martyn Salter. "In conjunction with Integra's e-Procurement module, our ongoing net savings could rise to around £85,000 per annum."

Martyn Salter says that when he visited Capita IB Solutions' NHS reference site, he found the managers were very complimentary about Integra, how it was implemented, the level of support from Capita IB Solutions and the personal relationships they had built up with the project team.

"We've had exactly the same experience," he said. "Capita IB Solutions' staff have been friendly, approachable, professional and very helpful. They know what they're doing and if there's a problem, they're responsive and they sort it out very quickly."

The Future

London Ambulance Service is constantly striving to achieve efficiency gains, and Integra will play a part in meeting this objective. "We're under enormous pressure to deliver substantial savings that can be used for front line services," said Martyn Salter. "Integra gives us better and quicker financial information with which to manage the service, and that's a vital ingredient in our quest for greater efficiency."

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