

CLIENT Local Government Ombudsman

PROJECT TITLE Complaint Management Transformation

How LGO
met a
37%
budget cut
and thrived

A budget cut of 37%, an increase in caseload and falling staff numbers. This is the perfect storm the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) in England faced in 2013/2014.

They not only survived, they thrived.

Productivity has increased by 29.7%. Cost per case, already one of the lowest in the sector, has been further reduced. Performance targets are being exceeded and quality standards improved.



How did they do it?

Through a radical business transformation project which combined significant culture change with simplified, streamlined ways of working.

LGO uses a Workpro case management system from CAS* to manage all complaints and enquiries. Workpro is used throughout the organisation, from front-line staff in the intake team, to caseworkers in the assessment and investigation teams. An update of the Workpro system to match and support LGO's new business processes was a key part of the project. Internally the system is named ECHO.

Process Transformation

LGO investigates complaints from the public about local public services and social care providers in England. The LGO also provides guidance to organisations within its remit on good practice in complaint handling.

Prior to the organisational revamp, there were too many steps in the process and a too high proportion of cases was being passed to investigation, causing a bottleneck in the system. This also resulted in little differentiation in the handling of complex and less complex cases.

This mattered. By the time people contact the Ombudsman they have usually gone through a lengthy complaints process with the service provider. Patience is wearing thin and, crucially, systemic injustices could keep occurring if not quickly identified and put right. The process was radically re-designed. An assessment stage was added and new performance targets adopted.

The assessment stage is critical for identifying high risk cases, like a hospital triage system, enabling LGO's handling of cases to be proportionate to the issues raised.

The Workpro case management system was able to adapt to the new process. The new performance targets (e.g. initial response to all enquiries within one day, assessment of 80% of registered complaints for investigation within 20 days) were built in to the workflow, with alerts and reminders to keep staff on track.

Frontline Empowerment

One of the big winners was giving front line people the power to take action, make decisions, while knowing where their boundaries lay.

In 2014-15 LGO registered 20,286 new complaints and enquiries. "Increasingly our intake team are able to quickly resolve many of those queries at first telephone contact by responding to the caller's questions and concerns, providing advice about our role or how the complaints process works." LGO Annual Report 2014/2015.

Workpro supports frontline staff in this by:

- Accepting new cases by letter, e-mail, telephone and text.
- Providing step-by-step workflows and guidance.
- Allowing for front line resolution and reporting, or escalation for investigation.

Performance Benefits

There has been a significant improvement in the time to respond to enquiries, and complete investigations. 99% of complaints and enquiries are dealt with in a single working day by the Intake Team. 83% of decisions are issued within 13 weeks. The number of exceptional cases taking more than 52 weeks to complete fell from 117 in January 2013 to 44 in March 2015.

"In 2011-12, the last full year before LGO's new business model was introduced, we made 101.3 decisions per full-time equivalent investigator. In 2014-15, we made 131.4 decisions per full-time equivalent investigator. This represents a productivity increase of 29.7%, delivering further reductions in our cost per case, which is already one of the lowest in the sector." **LGO Annual Report 2014/2015**

Workpro supports this productivity increase by:

- Validating case entry for accuracy and completeness, saving time and duplication of effort later.
- Integrating case document management, plus e-mail and document templates for consistency and speed.
- Prompting case progress with alerts and reminders, including "third party chase ups".
- Providing performance monitoring and management reporting.

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* Computer Application Services Ltd (CAS) is highly experienced in the implementation of case and complaints management systems. We help organisations to improve customer service and ensure compliance with regulation, and business process, while reducing case handling costs.



"Our business is looking into complaints and the vast majority of LGO's staff rely on an effective case management system every day, if not every

hour. CAS have supported us to make our system as straightforward and simple to use as it can be, yet flexible enough to adapt to our changing business needs. We feel that this partnership approach has been an essential component in helping us to manage a successful change programme in very challenging circumstances." **Nigel Ellis, Executive Director of Operations at the Local Government Ombudsman**

System Transformation. Three Key Elements

The Workpro upgrade went like clockwork but this was no happy accident. Priority was given to ensuring this part of the transformation project was a success.

3 key elements were critical:

- **Joint development of a clear specification.** CAS staff participated in LGO team meetings during the process design stage to ensure that expectations were met and to ensure that work could be fully completed on time.
- **Commitment from the top** in both organisations to the success of the project. Lines of communication were agreed from the outset, with time taken to understand what had worked well in the past and what not so well, and to adopt new ways of joint working.
- **Honest and realistic appraisal** of what was needed and what could be achieved.

This honest, frank and collaborative approach continues with ongoing meetings to agree future joint roadmaps.

"We invested time (on both sides) to agree realistic and achievable aims for the upgrade that we could both sign up to. We established a single line of communication and a clear, timely, decision-making process in both organisations that we adhered to throughout the project. I would also say that both LGO and CAS were willing to be flexible on the smaller issues, knowing that we had a shared understanding of the system we needed to develop and the timescales we were both working to. The product was delivered successfully and on time - there were teething problems in the early stages but nothing insurmountable or that would cause me to want to take a different approach in future." **Nigel Ellis, Executive Director Operations at the Local Government Ombudsman**