

Shropshire Council: streamlining management information

Summary

Shropshire Council has refined its processes for maintaining street and address information. It has demonstrated that a unified approach can be a more efficient and effective way to carry out day-to-day council activities.

Key learnings for other councils

- Efficiencies can often be identified by taking a step back and learning how others organise their activities.
- Working in partnership produced benefits throughout different authorities.
- In the case of Shropshire, one unified approach to statutory functions saves time, improves working relationships and is more efficient.
- The revised approach enables Shropshire to adapt to change quickly, creating a more robust range of services.

Background to the authority

Shropshire Council was successful in securing its bid for unitary status, which came into effect on 1 April 2009. Five district councils and one county council were merged to create a single unitary council. Unitary status for Shropshire was expected to help improve frontline services by providing more joined-up functions throughout the council.

Who was involved?

This project involved the Local Land and Property Gazetteer (LLPG) custodians in each district as well as the Local Street Gazetteer (LSG) custodian at the county council.

The problems and how we tackled them

The vision for a more efficient process of managing street information began in early 2006. The county council's Highway Asset Management team, responsible for maintaining highway information, agreed a more unified structure with the district councils.

Previously, the communication structure in Shropshire was fragmented, with unclear roles and responsibilities. This was partly due to the disparate nature of the functions which were spread over different districts and the county council. The LLPG function within each district was quite separate from the LSG function.

This set-up was inefficient. While the various duties were carried out, many emails transferred between the different officers with competing interests. This, in turn, led to a lack of clarity over which task should be completed by which organisation. The result was duplication of effort and mismatches between records in the LLPG and LSG.

The original system had grown organically over time as the various roles and tasks associated with the LLPG and LSG developed. It was a legacy system based on individual local authority needs, rather than a strategic overview of the service.

To improve working relationships between the various functions, and departmental efficiency, a series of quarterly custodian meetings was agreed. These involved all staff in the LLPG and LSG areas. The aims were to improve the operation of these functions and provide peer support.

An important part of these meetings was to provide the opportunity for face-to-face debate over individual records in the LLPG and LSG database. This enabled the group to learn about each other's roles. Through these meetings, relationships between the individual authorities developed and a shared vision emerged.

At a regional LLPG and LSG meeting a 'best practice' structure for managing the functions was presented. The LSG custodian was tasked with developing an improved information management system, covering the creating of addresses and street names throughout Shropshire.

This would replace the disparate procedures which often duplicated work and resulted in conflict between different functions. The new arrangement provided an opportunity to completely reconfigure the process.

Improved relationships had developed through the regular custodian meetings. Consequently, the LSG custodian offered to delegate some of the street gazetteer tasks to the LLPG custodians and street naming and numbering (SNN) officers.

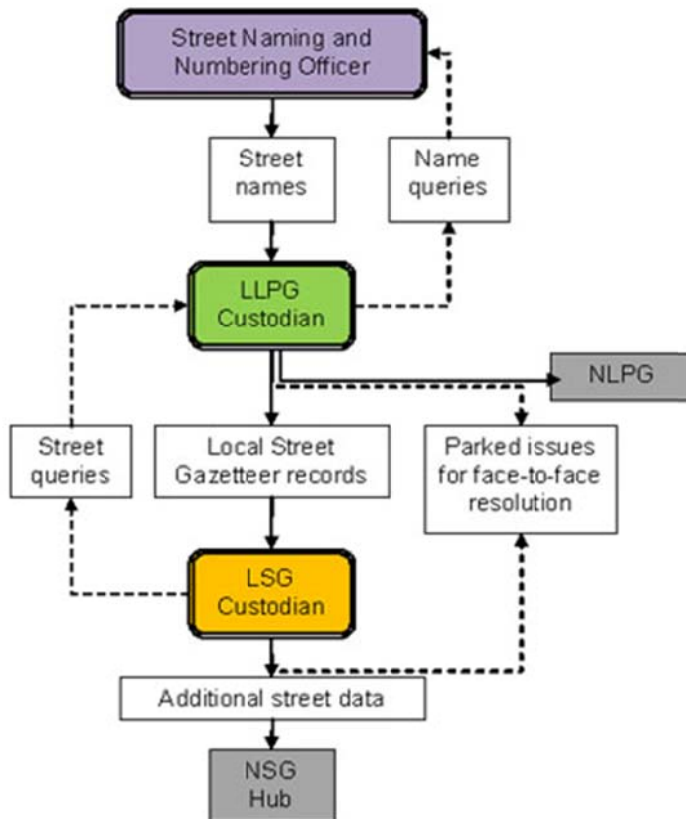
Essentially:

- the SNN officer now assigns street names and numbers to the buildings on that street
- the LLPG custodian assigns the unique street reference number (USRN)
- the LSG custodian then adds further additional street data, which could include local knowledge on traffic sensitivity and reinstatement category as well as drawing the street geometry.

Outcomes and impact

A protocol was agreed between the custodians to ensure that the needs of the Highway Authority were not at risk. Crucially, the right of veto by the LSG custodian was included in this protocol to protect the LSG – a right which has yet to be invoked at the time of writing.

[The diagram below shows a new structure for streamlining the functions associated with creating, naming and maintaining road, street and building information in Shropshire. It identifies how the street naming and numbering officer, Local Land and Property Gazetteer (LLPG) and the Local Street Gazetteer are central to this process.]



This revised structure identifies each function with a distinct contribution to the LLPG and LSG system. Interest from the LLPG custodians was immediate and resulted in an effective partnership in which each of the partners had a defined role under a shared vision.

This revised method of working was incrementally adopted on a district-by-district basis. In this way, resources could be managed effectively in each local authority. It also enabled the group to learn about the issues and create solutions as the need arose.

Overall, it took three years for all partners to be harmonised into the new system. This was largely due to delays with IT. Progress was maintained through buy-in at both senior management level and the officers directly involved in the work.

From the perspective of LLPG and LSG functions, the transition to unitary status was rendered straightforward as these functions had already been unified. Had this not been done, the previous organically developed disparate functions would have resulted in many problems in moving to unitary status.

The LSG function now benefits from all functions working together with clear roles and goals. The LSG and street works systems are overseen by the LSG custodian who has strategic control over resources, activities and operations. This enables fast problem resolution, knowledge sharing and a structure that is quick to adapt to change.

What could we have done better?

The main area which presented real challenge related to IT systems. Significant delays were experienced in the early stages of the project due to inadequate street gazetteer management systems. These hampered the LLPG custodians who were eager to move forward.

The custodians did anticipate some of the issues and took steps to reduce their effect on the project. Not all issues could be anticipated, however. As with all projects of this nature, building in contingency is invaluable.

Next steps

Currently, the LLPG and LSG functions are still managed on separate IT systems, even though the process now has a clear structure and is operationally joined-up. A single IT system for both the LLPG and LSG functions is envisaged. This should create further efficiency and the council is currently working towards this goal.

Contact

Darren Merrill, Highway Asset Manager
Shropshire Council
telephone: 01743 255429
email: Darren.Merrill@shropshire.gov.uk

Useful links

[Shropshire Council website](#)