Brisbane city council

Company: ComshareCustomer: Brisbane City Council(AUSTRALIA) Brisbane City Council (BCC) is the largest local government organisation in Australia with an annual budget exceeding $AUD 1. 3 billion. To ensure strong fiscal and financial management for current and future community needs, BCC has implemented a Web-based management planning and control (MPC) system on Oracle with Comshare and its Australian distributor, Beacon IT Solutions. Over 100 staff use the system to better execute their corporate plans through having a unified budgeting, financial data consolidation, and management reporting and analysis system.

The Council

BCC provides the essential infrastructure and community services to the 820, 000 residents of Brisbane, Australia. Offices are located throughout the Brisbane region and the Council employs 6000 staff.

The head office and City Hall are located in Brisbane, the capital city of Queensland. The Council undertakes traditional local government activities including road construction and maintenance, sanitation, and parks and gardens. BCC owns and operates the bus network, water supply and sewerage networks and is organised into four commercial business units – Fleet, Water, Transport and City Works. There are also 18 separate City Businesses that provide services as diverse as car parking, major venues and pools, building certification, financial consulting and IT. Brisbane is an important business centre within the Asia Pacific Region and plays a pivotal role in the development of the Queensland economy. BCC is actively building partnerships to increase business investment and opportunities for local

industry as well as continuing to develop trade and commerce opportunities in the Asia Pacific Region.

The business requirement

The budget is the key financial planning document of BCC and is published on its web site (www. brisbane. qld. gov. au/). This provides the focus for the Council's activities for the coming year and financial accountability through budgeted financial statements.

It also reflects the policies and direction of the administration and links to the corporate plan. BCC has 11 programs fully aligned to the corporate plan and the budget including city governance, economic development, customer service, and community life. Two years ago putting together and publishing this budget was a major challenge. Greg Ponych, Principal Finance Officer, BCC explains, " Prior to Comshare we used a custom written, in-house budgeting system running on anIBMmainframe.

The system suffered from inflexibility, cumbersome reporting and there was a lack of appropriate skills in the market to perform maintenance and enhancements. Increasingly the process was being handled off-line on spreadsheets, which introduced security, version control and maintenance issues."" We were also undertaking a fundamental review of the budget process itself," says Greg Ponych. " This process re-engineering actually proved to be more of a challenge than the system. The Council moved from a ' Program Based' accrual budget to a ' Results Based' accrual budget.

This bonded our strategic planning and budgeting processes and brought two previously separate groups – planners and finance people – together.

Elements of this re-engineering were still evolving and we needed to be sure that any future direction we wanted to pursue could be supported by our choice of new system."

The solution

BCC considered solutions provided by over eight vendors including those from Beacon IT Solutions, Adaytum, and Hyperion. In the tender document BCC outlined its vision of an MPC system that integrates strategic planning (incorporating a Balanced Scorecard reporting paradigm), budgeting, capital project evaluations, long term financial modelling and cash forecasting. Internally the MPC system would be known as SmiS (Strategic Management Information System).

" Beacon and Comshare's proposal met all our key requirements," says Greg Ponych. " Comshare's product development strategy was consistent with our own strategic IT direction. Oracle DBMS is the Council's current standard for all multi-user corporate database applications and Comshare was the only vendor that could provide a truly Web-based MPC system on an Oracle database."" Comshare is well established and has a strong global reputation," adds Greg Ponych. " At the local level, Beacon could provide the high standard of accounting and budgeting expertise we were looking for.

" The MPC solution went live progressively from December 1999 to March 2000. The roll out was phased to meet particular needs at certain milestones in the process. An important hurdle for Beacon was an extensive testing process that simulated hundreds of users ' pressing the buttons at the same time'. Both the client/server and web versions were tested and far exceeded

BCC's expectations. BCC chose to implement both versions working on the same database. This gave them the flexibility to match the new system with their existing infrastructure and to individual user requirements.

The benefits

The wide range of users from data entry and reporting staff to budget analysts and financial controllers are using the system to review and approve plans, and reflect these plans in the budget. Users have a Web browser and a password to access the central database, sharing one version of the truth." We are very close to achieving our vision of an enterprise wide MPC system that fully integrates the corporate planning and budget processes," says Greg Poysch. " Our recently approved 2000-2001 budget is on our web site and shows how each strategic goal will be reflected in the budget. Using management reporting and analysis we will be able to compare actuals against budget and monitor change within each program."" Flexible reporting and online analysis means the corporate review of the budget prior to the presentation to the CEO has been reduced from 3 weeks to 1 week," continues Greg Ponych.

" Users are alerted to exceptions in the underlying data and spend more time on significant business issues rather than wading through bulky reports. They particularly like the colour-coded exceptions especially the hierarchical tree viewer – Overview. They are impressed by the ease of drilling down and rotating dimensions to change their view of the data. We also expect further savings in the consolidation process and the review of forecasts in the near future."" From an administrator's perspective, the stability and usability of the system is also a great benefit," adds Greg Ponych.

" Maintenance is much easier as the software is loaded only once on to the application server and no software has to be loaded on to the users' PCs.""" Our responsibility is to enhance the lifestyle of Brisbane's residents through innovations in community development and facilities," says Greg Ponych. " To achieve this we want to better execute our strategic plan and reflect this in our operational plans and this requires considerable effort, co-ordination and management. Comshare's MPC system has added great value to BCC by making this process easier and more effective, helping us to meet our responsibility and achieve our vision to make Brisbane the most livable and progressive city in the Asia-Pacific region."