

Case study

Moore Stephens Consulting

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StARS-MS case study: Merseyside Fire & Rescue Authority

When the Merseyside Fire & Rescue Authority ('Merseyside Fire and Rescue') needed to update its rostering system, its new HR and payroll application wasn't able to meet its specialist requirements. Instead the team found some of its problems solved by StARS-MS, the staff attendance and rostering system, developed by Moore Stephens Consulting with fire services specifically in mind.

Merseyside Fire & Rescue Authority protects a population of 1.4m people in an area of 645 square kilometres. The metropolitan service currently has a headcount of approximately 670 fire-fighters and over 250 support staff and operates across 30 different sites including 25 community fire stations.

As Mike Pilkington, Time & Resource Manager at Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service explains, the existing rostering system was in urgent need of an upgrade. "Our previous system had become obsolete," he says. "It was a system that required significant manual intervention and processing and hadn't kept up with how our organisation had developed. It was quite rigid and as we were becoming more innovative, we knew we needed a system that could accommodate increased sophistication and be more flexible to meet our needs."

In a competitive tender process, Moore Stephens Consulting's StARS-MS emerged as the best fit, based on a scoring matrix considering how closely the application met Merseyside Fire & Rescue's specifications. "StARS-MS is an integrated personnel management system hosted offsite and using the latest Microsoft technologies," says Simon Lamb, a director at Moore Stephens Consulting. "It is designed to help fire services operate more efficiently by streamlining their whole process of managing their personnel and resources."

The flexibility offered by StARS-MS was another major attraction. "We are aware that as a modern public sector organisation we need to be able to adapt and change to meet the demands of our communities," Pilkington says. "StARS-MS allows us to

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Simon Lamb – Director, MS Consulting

administer and configure a significant part of the system ourselves. We can change rules and other aspects without having to constantly go back to the developers. This was important to us."

Supported implementation

Moore Stephens Consulting held a number of workshops with Merseyside Fire & Rescue to gain a full understanding of how the new rostering system needed to work, including the levels of access that different staff would need. It was established that StARS-MS would handle all aspects of absence management, leave and rota management, and we would work towards integration with our mobilising system for real-time resource updates.

The process of populating StARS-MS with Merseyside Fire & Rescue data was straightforward. To allow ease of data migration of the current paper and computer data, as well as the initial reference data, Moore Stephens Consulting provided template Excel spreadsheets. These were used to record the data as part of the standard data migration process into the StARS-MS database.

Implementing a new system is always challenging, but the Merseyside Fire & Rescue team felt they had the help they needed. "We definitely felt supported along the way," says Lee Hughes, who led the implementation process at Merseyside Fire & Rescue and is now the StARS-MS system administrator. "Moore Stephens Consulting were very hands-on in terms of guiding what information they needed from us. It was intensive and a lot of work, but it wasn't difficult."



Efficiency benefits

There are clear examples where implementing StARS-MS has directly improved efficiency, both for support and operational staff. As an example the Time & Resource Management team used to call all 25 fire stations morning and evening – to check on staffing levels and the skills spread available in order to organise staff movements. "Now we click a button and that information is there in seconds," says Hughes.

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Lee Hughes, System Administrator

Before StARS-MS, after the first round of phone calls the team would potentially have to call each station back to arrange to move personnel between stations, in effect making potentially 100 or so calls a day. "We now update the application with required movements, so our detached duty phone calls have been cut by 80%-90%," Pilkington estimates. "Tens of thousands of calls to stations are no longer made, which saves time and cost."

"We are able to work a lot smarter than previously," Pilkington says. "We have removed a huge amount of paper processing. A key corporate aim is to improve both efficiency and effectiveness across the organisation."

With StARS-MS our operational staff can use less of their time for administrative work and have more time to spend out in the community on prevention, protection and preparedness activity. There's less of an administrative burden. Automation has also removed the need for paper processing of numerous fire-fighter's claims when seeking reimbursement of travel and expenses with further efficiencies planned for the future.

The system is also more robust. "The systems we have in place are stronger, more auditable," Pilkington says. "There is less chance for human error."

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Mike Pilkington, Time & Resource Manager

User friendliness

"StARS-MS is much more accessible than our old system," Hughes says. "As a modern, Windows application its feels both familiar and user-friendly therefore is easier to use."

As a result, getting everyone – operational and support staff – up to speed has been straightforward. "We found StARS-MS to be quite intuitive, so we didn't have to invest a lot of time or money in visits to fire stations to train people," Pilkington says. "We didn't need to bring in all staff and give them a half day's training and we didn't need to set up a training team".

"We were able to issue user guides and training notes and record demonstration videos online, so people could train themselves. The availability of a training environment was also useful to allow staff to familiarise themselves with functionality without impacting on the live data set".

Improved planning

The Merseyside Fire & Rescue team is now able to plan ahead more effectively in terms of staffing levels and potential shortfalls. "It used to be very time consuming to work out what resources we had on any particular day," Pilkington says. "Now, with the click of a button, StARS-MS allows us to see where we are going to be, whether this is next week, month or year and make interventions as necessary. If for example we identify shifts when we are going to be particularly short of staff or skills, we can deal that much sooner than previously. The information being there at the touch of a button also allows more effective management reporting."

This is not only good for efficiency and planning from the organisation's perspective, but is also welcomed by firefighters. "We often bring in staff for additional hours when there are shortfalls," Hughes says. "Before StARS staff could only be arranged at short notice when it can be difficult to rearrange personal commitments. Planning further ahead removes this issue"



Ongoing innovation

A second phase of StARS-MS implementation is expected to deliver further efficiencies by removing even more of the administrative burden from staff. "Once Phase 2 has been completed we already have ideas for Phase 3," Pilkington says. "It's all about trying to make us more efficient and effective and remove unnecessary administrative burdens".

Flexible support

The Merseyside Fire & Rescue team have appreciated Moore Stephens Consulting's flexible support and willingness to adapt StARS-MS to meet their specific needs. "MSC are as keen to make it work as we are," Hughes says. "They are open to working with us to adapt it. They are open to our development ideas and to changing the system in ways that suit us."

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Mike Pilkington, Time & Resource Manager

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