

Surrey County Council – Digital Business & Insights Programme

Lessons Learned Review

Introduction

Digital Business & Insights (DB&I) is the name given by Surrey County Council to its programme to implement the “MySurrey” Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system provided by Unit4, to replace its existing SAP system.

ERP system implementations are, by their nature, large-scale, complex, and time-consuming. The experience across local government is that such programmes are often subject to delay and cost increase, placing significant strain on the organisations undertaking them. The experience at Surrey is in line with this. By way of background:

- The programme spanned over four years, from inception in summer 2019 to closure in December 2023, and was driven by an imperative to replace the existing SAP ERP system which was originally expected to cease to be supported from 2022
- The scope of functions impacted by the programme was extensive, comprising all core financial, HR, payroll, and procurement systems; and (particularly given a strong emphasis on self-service) affected all council departments and schools, and will have touched almost all council employees.
- Following a procurement process the chosen software-as-a-service (SaaS) was provided by Unit4, an experienced ERP provider, and implemented in conjunction with its partner, Embridge Consulting. The system was subsequently named “MySurrey” by the Council.
- System go-live was achieved in June 2023, compared to an original target date of December 2021.
- The Council had used SAP since around 2005 and, while it had been maintained and upgraded during this time, it was felt that the product had limitations that were not consistent for the Council’s vision for an ERP.
- The latest approved budget for the programme is £27.9 million, compared to an original figure of £16.6 million. The increase was a combination of internal and external supplier costs.

Lessons Learned Review

Capturing lessons learned is an integral and important part of any programme. For this programme, two specific lessons learned objectives have been addressed as part of this review:

- **Ensure that experiences and knowledge are captured**, good and bad, and fed into a continuous improvement process.
- **Capture learnings that can be shared with peers and help inform other projects and programmes** of a similar nature (in terms of complexity and scale), both within SCC and more broadly with external partners, where public money is being committed to on a similar scale.

For this review, the approach has comprised:

- Review of key programme reports and documentation over its lifetime, including programme board papers and the interim lessons learned report produced by Internal Audit in the summer of 2022
- Interviews with members of the Programme Board, programme team and senior representatives from the supplier, conducted between November 2023 and January 2024

- Survey of, and discussion with, subject matter experts working with the programme, in January 2024
- Engagement with system “advocates” (employees in business-as-usual roles but with specific interest in the new system), in February 2024
- High-level triangulation of the author’s understanding of the experiences of other councils undertaking ERP replacement programmes

The outputs of the review are intended to contribute to a Lessons Learned Review being undertaken by a Task & Finish Group of the Resources & Performance Select Committee.

It is important to state that the review is not intended as a forensic examination or investigation of all decisions made in regard of the programme over its four and a half year lifetime. Nor does it attempt to assess the functionality of the MySurrey system provided by Unit4. Instead it seeks to capture learning so that its lessons can inform and contribute towards the success of other projects and programmes, whether within Surrey or elsewhere in local government.

Overall Observations

DB&I has been an extremely challenging programme for all involved. Implementation of the new system was significantly delayed, additional budget has had to be provided, and there have been a range of system and user issues to be addressed post go-live. All these factors have impacted negatively on the perception of the system across the organisation and schools. Despite the formal closure of the programme, work has continued to address issues and to improve user awareness and experience.

The challenges should, however, be seen in the context of:

- The complexity and scale of the programme, which can be viewed as a “once-in-a-generation” event (SAP had been in place since c2005)
- The similar challenges affecting implementations in other organisations – for example, the much-publicised problems with the Oracle implementation in Birmingham City Council, delays in other councils such as Norfolk County Council, and delays and budget overruns in as-yet incomplete implementations in both East and West Sussex County Councils
- The commitment and hard work of all those involved in the programme, whether programme board members, programme team members, suppliers, subject matter experts or system advocates, all geared towards achieving successful outcomes
- Delivery of the programme despite periods of lockdown and enforced working from home
- The strong programme management structure and methodology used throughout the lifetime of the programme including procurement

Lessons Learned

There are many lessons that can be learned from the DB&I programme. This review has identified nine key themes, through triangulation of the feedback and evidence collected. The nine are not intended to be exhaustive and the review heard from individuals of many personal lessons learned. Those presented here are those which were most common and/or significant when assessing the feedback and evidence.

In summary, the nine themes are listed in the table below, with a summary of the key lessons learned under each theme. They are in no particular order. Each of the nine is explained in more detail in a subsequent section.

Section	Lessons Learned Theme	Key Lessons Learned
A	Organisational readiness, optimism and understanding of the “as-is” position	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure a full understanding of “as-is” processes and weaknesses so that the weaknesses can ideally be addressed in advance (or, if not in advance, then as an integral and focused part) of the implementation; and stress-test the resilience of key functions to withstand the pressures generated by implementation alongside business-as-usual delivery • Be very cognisant of the “special” requirements of specific parts of the council such as in schools • Be realistic in setting implementation plans, recognising that it is highly unlikely to be feasible to adopt new technology in a “vanilla” form • Be realistic about the capability and capacity of the programme to overcome problems being flagged up; there should retain a strong commitment to hitting deadlines and staying within budget, but balanced with a flexibility to respond to issues being reported that need time to properly address them.
B	Aspects of programme management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that the programme has a strong discipline around stage control with clear evidence-led decisions around entry and exit criteria • Consider the extent of in-house ERP-specific knowledge required for each stage of a programme • Consider how best to construct testing programmes in order to provide good understanding and assurance over the pre go-live readiness of both the system and the organisation.
C	Leadership, governance, and oversight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure strong links between service subject matter experts and programme board members, and consider the role of formal Workstream Boards within a programme’s governance framework • Ensure that the programme vision is owned and understood at all levels of the organisation and that it underpins all aspects of the system design • Ensure sufficient capacity for the programme sponsor and programme board members, and consider the possible role of a part-time or full-time senior responsible officer (distinct from the programme director) in supporting the sponsor

		and board in driving the vision and realising benefits.
D	Procurement, contracting model and commercials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carefully consider the contract framework to be selected, and give thought to how to establish the right behaviours required between client and contractor in order to solve problems and manage complex issues • Ensure thorough and critical review of requirement-setting, linked to a clear vision of the business benefits that the new system is expected to deliver
E	Technical issues - data migration and environment management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure a strong focus from the outset on data, including ownership, responsibilities, cleansing, tools, timely migration and workstream leadership • Ensure control over the management of technical system environments
F	Aspects of change and engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable those involved in the design and build of the system (and end-users receiving training) to have access to a model system as early as possible, thus enabling them to gain familiarity with the new system • The programme’s Advocate Network was an example of very good practice • Maintain a good balance of attention between the preparedness of the system and that of the user community, refreshing and reaffirming the programme’s communications and engagement to overcome, as far as is possible, programme fatigue and scepticism
G	Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When embarking on ERP replacement programmes that will have a large impact on schools, consider from the outset the “to-be” business model and make a decision, in consultation with schools, about the extent of functionality to be provided • Ensure dedicated resourcing of a distinct communications and engagement workstream with schools • Ensure that the design and build of the new system is conducted in full cognizance of the requirements of schools, utilising the knowledge of school-based staff
H	Go-live support model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure proper planning for go-live scenarios, ensuring close attention on the rapid

		<p>identification of issues across helpdesks, and communication to users of both issues and fixes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consider whether to engage specialist third party go-live technical and user support resources which provide, at a cost, a more flexible model to respond to peaks in helpdesk demand
I	People	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Look after the wellbeing of people involved in all aspects of the programme• Consider how to get the best balance of working styles with a mix of home- and office-based working, using the latter to enable teams to come together to exchange ideas, solve problems and build a strong sense of teamwork

I am grateful for the time and openness of all those who contributed to this review.

Phil Hall

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Appendices

1. Original Programme Timeline
2. Programme History Overview
3. Survey of Programme Advocates
4. List of interviewees

A: Organisational readiness, optimism and understanding of the “as-is” position

The implementation of a new ERP system is a complex and large-scale process. It touches all parts of an organisation with deep impacts on the processes at their core – finance, HR, payroll, and procurement.

The DB&I programme had a strong structure and approach to the task of implementation from its inception. Led by an experienced programme manager, there was a good programme management methodology, involvement of subject matter experts, and a positive strategy for communications, engagement and for ensuring the organisation was ready to adopt the new technology. There was a detailed set of Requirements compiled for use in the procurement of the new system.

Despite these strong foundations, there are a number of lessons that can be learned under a common theme of organisational readiness, optimism and understanding of the “as-is” position. These are summarised below.

Firstly, the original implementation plan was set at 15 months. With hindsight this proved unrealistic and adhering to it until a late stage then caused further problems for the programme as it had to address the perception issues of a missed go-live date.

The 15 month timeline had been set with the extensive involvement of Moore Stephens Insight who advised on the strategic option appraisal and pre-procurement activities. It then formed a parameter within the procurement process and all bidders were asked to prepare their bids on the basis of it. Experience elsewhere however indicates that a 15 month timeline would be extremely optimistic and assume that the organisation was fully ready for the new technology, would adopt it in a largely “vanilla” form, and would experience minimal implementation issues. A county council of the scale and complexity of Surrey would be unlikely to be in such a position – as experienced by other county councils who have implemented SAP replacements. With hindsight, interviewees identified that more time was needed for a combination of reasons:

- SAP had been in place for nearly 20 years and there was a common understanding that its processes were well-understood. Whilst the technology configuration and support aspects of the system were documented, this was not always the case for the functional teams, where in some cases knowledge was concentrated in particular individuals. It was therefore difficult to capture all aspects of the processes in either the Requirements or Design phases and gaps became evident at later stages of the programme.
- There was insufficient recognition of deep-rooted weaknesses in functions within the Business Operations area, notably payroll, which only became apparent during the course of the programme. These are now being addressed through the Payroll Improvement Programme. With hindsight the decision to exit from providing payroll services to academy schools should have been taken prior to the programme commencing.
- In an organisation as complex as Surrey there are bespoke processes for specific areas of the council, notably schools (see Section G) but also fire and rescue and adult social care. These were not fully understood or documented as part of the Requirements or Design phases and therefore had to be addressed at later stages.
- It is a common mantra of modern ERP programmes for organisations to “adopt not adapt” the new system so that there is minimal customisation (important in a SaaS context for easing transition to upgrades and new releases). With the complexity of organisations such as county

councils the mantra is not necessarily straightforward as some business requirements are not catered for within the standard ERP product, and therefore demand adaptation of it; and there will be a need for adaptation of existing processes in order to adopt the new technology. Inevitably there will be a wish for customisation of the system to reflect existing processes and, if enacted, this can lead to problems becoming evident at the Build and Test stages. In part this can reflect the programme vision being insufficiently owned at all levels of the organisation (see Section F).

A further aspect to this theme concerns the acknowledgement of issues being reported through the programme structure. At all times, the Board demonstrated a strong commitment to meeting deadlines and staying within budget. This may however have contributed to a collective belief that problems and issues were surmountable. The programme timeline (Appendix B) highlights that the Board made the difficult decisions to delay go-live target dates only after periods of significant issues being reported to them. For example, the decision to postpone the original December 2021 go-live was made in late September following a period in which the programme had been assessed as Amber since July; more significantly the decision to postpone the revised April 2022 go-live was made in March following the programme reporting as Red since November 2021. This may reflect a collective underestimation of the extent or depth of delivery issues being reported and an over-confidence, by the programme team, implementation partner and board who were all focused on reducing risks to a manageable level, in the ability of the programme to overcome them.

The key lessons within this theme are therefore to:

- Ensure a full understanding of “as-is” processes and weaknesses so that the weaknesses can ideally be addressed in advance (or, if not in advance, then as an integral and focused part) of the implementation; and stress-test the resilience of key functions to withstand the pressures generated by implementation alongside business-as-usual delivery
- Be very cognisant of the “special” requirements of specific parts of the council such as schools
- Be realistic in setting implementation plans, recognising that it is highly unlikely to be feasible to adopt new technology in a “vanilla” form
- Be realistic about the capability and capacity of the programme to overcome problems being flagged up through its structure; there should retain a strong commitment to hitting deadlines and staying within budget, but balanced with a flexibility to respond to issues being reported that need time to properly address them.

It is to be remembered that an ERP replacement is a once-in-a-generation event and the organisation will not have the knowledge or experience to anticipate all potential issues and problems. There is a key role for the supplier and its implementation partner to bring their experience and for there to be an opportunity within the contractual framework for a meaningful dialogue with the council about what is possible and where more time may be required, and hence to agree a deliverable programme timeline.

B: Aspects of programme management

From initiation there was an investment in programme management, with the appointment of a programme director with considerable experience in delivery of complex programmes and the adoption of a clear and recognised programme management methodology. The programme's outline and full business cases were approved by the Council's Cabinet and the project initiation document detailed the approach to be followed by the programme. Each programme board meeting was presented with a RAG-rated highlight report and RAG assessments of milestones, risks, and issues

As illustrated by Annex A the original programme plan divided the implementation into a series of discrete stages, in line with established ERP best practice. At this time in 2019 Surrey had yet to develop its internal standard project and programme guidance, but it is apparent that a complex and large-scale programme such as DB&I would have required its own specific methodology even had the guidance been in place at the time; ie DB&I adopted a model that was consistent with the now corporate guidelines but was by necessity more detailed and informed by ERP best practice.

The main lesson learned identified by interviewees under this theme was around stage control. With the pressure to achieve a target go-live date there was an observed tendency to press ahead with the next planned phase of activity, even where the previous one had not been fully completed. An example would be in HR transactional processes where the Design phase had to be reworked because of gaps that had become apparent in the subsequent Build phase. Because of the need to maintain pace within the programme, the Programme Board, with the support of the implementation partner, allowed work to continue in Build and into the Test phase. However the consequences of this were not fully understood at the time and it became apparent later that, for example, testing was not fully possible because aspects of the Design and Build were still being worked on. This was a significant feature of the issues affecting the programme in late 2021/early 2022. With hindsight, an earlier decision could have been made to pause and to ensure completion of Design and Build prior to entering Test. It is recognised that this would still have resulted in a delay to go-live but at least an earlier decision would have allowed expectations to be better managed and for other activity such as training to be scheduled at a more appropriate time.

The above lesson was recognised by the programme in preparation for the final target go-live of June 2023. Following three missed go-live dates the criticality of hitting a revised one was recognised and there was a concerted effort to identify all significant issues that might adversely affect the ability to go-live. These issues were captured in what was called the "red box." The programme focused on resolution of the "red box" issues by a target of December 2022 to enable confidence that the June 2023 go-live target was deliverable. The "red box" was closed by the programme board on target in December 2022.

It is noted that the council's programme team, while being highly experienced and skilled at programme management, did not have prior knowledge of the Unit4 product. Priority was given, understandably, to generic programme management skills and experience and to organisational knowledge over knowledge of the specific ERP. This is a tricky balance to strike and in a more straightforward programme it would be reasonable to assume that the implementation partner and system provider would supply sufficient technical knowledge of the system. With hindsight a number of interviewees expressed a wish that the Council had employed more technical expertise as part of its team, with less reliance on the implementation partner. As part of its Transition to BAU project the Council has opted to insource specific technical skills to enhance its in-house knowledge.

The programme board took a decision to go-live in the knowledge that not all issues had been resolved; this is an unavoidably difficult decision point for any programme when knowing that further delay to go-live would have adverse consequences (delay to the autumn of 2023 would have impacted negatively on schools as well as on budget) and a balancing of risks is required.

The board took its decision following testing of the new system that was planned as an essential part of the programme. This was a significant activity, with three full parallel payroll runs and seven test cycles being built into the programme. A full-time and experienced Test Manager was engaged and over 1,500 individual scripts developed in order to identify issues and to provide assurance that the system was ready to go-live. Despite the extent of testing, it is evident that it did not sufficiently identify all the issues that emerged after go-live. The lesson identified by interviewees here is that, notwithstanding the extent of testing, there was a mechanical aspect to the test programme which, despite its scale, failed to resolve all the issues and notably those relating to user awareness and readiness.

C: Leadership, governance, and oversight

The programme established a governance model from inception, with a programme board chaired by the programme sponsor (the Executive Director of Resources). The board consisted of senior management representatives from Finance, HR, Procurement, IT&D and Business Operations, together with senior representatives from the directorates of Adult Social Care, Children & Young People Services and (intermittently) Environment, Transport and Infrastructure, senior representatives from the suppliers and a representative of internal audit.

The board met regularly (at least monthly) with structured agendas, made and recorded decisions, and there was a remarkable continuity of membership, with most individuals maintaining their role on the board over the entire four and a half year lifespan of the programme. In their feedback, many members referenced the collegiate and supportive nature of the board, and it is evident that the board was able to “pull together” and make decisions with consensus. Board meetings were supplemented from time to time by a Sponsors Meeting which provided a forum for more informal discussion of options prior to decisions being signed off by the board.

In terms of lessons learned, the board identified, at the time of the first postponed go-live, that stronger linkages would be beneficial between board members and subject matter experts in their service areas. This was a response to board members reflecting that, despite the programme’s reporting of milestones, risks, and issues, they did not sufficiently appreciate the depth of challenges affecting the programme at that point in time. From autumn 2021 onwards board meetings received an update on one of the functional workstreams, led by the relevant board member together with their subject matter expert (SME). This helped to mitigate the risk of disconnection between board member and subject matter expert. An additional mitigation that is a feature of some ERP programmes elsewhere is to establish workstream sub-boards for each of the functional areas (finance, HR/payroll, procurement). In these models the workstream sub-board tends to be chaired by the board representative for that functional area and attended by the service SME together with colleagues from the core programme team and from the suppliers. Issues affecting that workstream are able to be resolved at that sub-board level, with the board representative being fully sighted and able to escalate effectively to the main board when required. Where this works well, it fosters strong ownership of the workstream by the board representative, provides a formal structure for communication and problem-resolution and mitigates against what can be an over-reliance on the programme team for reporting.

The 2022 interim lessons learned report by Internal Audit identified that there was some deviation between the programme vision, as captured in the PID, and what was ultimately implemented. Following go-live it can also be observed that the shift to more “self-service” by employees and managers was not always well-understood by staff. Interviewees for this review also highlighted vision and reality as an issue, for a variety of reasons:

- The vision was held at programme board level but not always understood by less senior staff working on the design, who often sought to influence the design of the new system to resemble more closely the SAP processes they were familiar with; it is likely that this understandable tendency was insufficiently challenged during the design process, leading to some inappropriate customisation of the product
- There was no clear definition between transactional HR processes that were placed within the Payroll, Employee Services and Helpdesk functions, against the more policy-related HR functions such as forms and policy-related processes. The former were ‘held’ within the Business Operations function which, whilst retaining considerable expertise within the Subject Matter

Experts, lacked leadership on the DB&I Board, particularly post December 2022, prior to Go Live. This led to a lack of clarity over who was the SRO in this area and subsequent lack of preparedness of the teams in question. The vision for the future of the HR systems, particularly around talent management, learning and development, performance and career development was not significantly developed pre-Go Live, despite the best efforts of the senior representative, due in part to lack of resource within the People & Change (HR) function, but also due to lack of expertise within this Organisational Development area.

- The lack of product visualisation (see Section F) limited the ability of many staff to imagine how the new system would meet the vision
- Certain aspects of the functionality of the new system, notably on mobile devices, was not understood and was ultimately the cause of some disappointment

Given the scale of complexity of ERP replacement programmes, it is important to consider the capacity of the board to provide the required leadership across the organisation to effect business change. Specific examples would be to drive the application of the vision through the design phase, ensuring that customisation is limited and only agreed where unavoidably required; and in championing the shift to self-service through both programme and directorate communication channels. It is apparent that board members had very busy diaries and, while meetings were well-attended throughout, there is a clear sense that board members felt constrained in their capacity to provide leadership outside of board meetings. There is no simple solution to this, and organisations planning large scale and complex programmes should consider how to ensure that senior managers are able to perform a wider leadership role. One possible means is to provide additional capacity to support the programme sponsor in the form of a senior responsible officer (SRO) that is distinct from the role of programme director; this would be an existing manager seconded to the role on a part- or full-time basis to support the sponsor in driving the vision and to bring service teams together to ensure good co-ordination, understanding and an ongoing focus on benefit realisation. The role should work closely alongside that of the programme director who is responsible for the delivery of programme workstreams and the programme plan. It is recognised that, towards the culmination of the DB&I Programme, this was a role increasingly played by the Director of Finance, Corporate & Commercial in support of the Programme Sponsor.

D: Procurement, contracting model and commercials

The Council was advised by Moore Stephens Insight (MSI) on its strategic options for replacement of SAP. Five options for the procurement were evaluated in the outline business case and the recommendation was to conduct a vendor neutral procurement of a SaaS corporate system and implementation partner services. This option was recommended to enable the council to fully evaluate its solution options and to drive best value for money through market competition. The agreed procurement strategy, which was further informed by external advice from Eversheds Sutherland LLP, was to conduct a single restricted OJEU tender process to let one contract to a lead supplier, whether an implementation partner or a SaaS corporate system vendor providing implementation services. The procurement process sought competitive bids that could be evaluated through a structured methodology, with weightings attached to various elements of the bidders' proposals including price, quality, and delivery experience. The procurement used an OJEU compliant process, with bidders asked to submit proposals to meet the Council's requirements.

While this was a structured and robust approach to the procurement, some observations have been made as part of the lessons learned review:

- The agnostic approach to strategic options meant that a variety of proposals were received, making evaluation of "like for like" more challenging
- The procurement elicited several bids on a "lead provider" model. Most of these bids were led by an implementation partner who introduced a preferred SaaS system. The Unit4 proposal was unusual in this regard as it was fronted by the software company which sub-contracted to its implementation partner, Embridge Consulting. Both Unit4 and Embridge have confirmed that this was unusual for them too – while they had experience of working together on bids, their usual practice was for Embridge to lead. In this case they reversed their model because of a concern that Embridge might not pass pre-procurement tests due to their size.

Through the evaluation process which showed it to have the highest weighted scores, Unit4 was selected as the preferred provider and the contract award was approved by Cabinet as part of the endorsement of the programme's Full Business Case (FBC). The contract provided for a fixed price for the implementation, and assumed delivery in fifteen months (see Section A).

A number of lessons learned have been identified under this theme:

- That a fixed price contract can foster "win-lose" behaviours between client and contractor when the programme encounters challenges, such as to deadlines.
- The need to avoid relationships becoming bogged down in contractual "back and forth" when solutions to complex programme problems are required
- That the contracting model with Unit4 as the lead contractor made it difficult for the Council to address perceived issues directly with the implementation partner, as that company was a sub-contractor to Unit4.

The choice of contracting model is an important one for councils to consider. The model used has a number of advantages such as ease of use and speed of procurement, but it is inflexible and may not promote the right behaviours. There is, however, no simple alternative. Contractors would understandably prefer a "time and materials" model to one based on fixed price, but this would be resisted by councils because of its implicit transfer of risk. A further model could be that used in strategic partnerships where there is a more sophisticated sharing of risk depending on the nature of change or risk being dealt with, and more emphasis on relationship and collective problem-solving.

However such a model would need to be developed bespoke, and procurement would inevitably take much longer to reach contract award stage.

A further lesson is around requirement-setting. The Council's contract schedule of Requirements and Supplier Response ran to over five hundred pages and covered all areas of functionality, integration, technical specification, and implementation approach. Despite this, some interviewees felt that the Requirements were insufficiently detailed or specific, and therefore too easy for a supplier to assert that their system would meet a particular requirement. At the other extreme, it was important for the council to avoid producing a set of Requirements that would be too prescriptive in terms of the "how" and rather to allow suppliers to put forward solutions that met the "what" requirement but potentially by a different "how" to SAP. The lesson that can be learned is to ensure thorough oversight and critical review of requirement-setting, linked to a clear vision of the business benefits that the new system is expected to deliver. In addition in the procurement process evaluators should be adequately trained and have sufficient time to enable them to evaluate thoroughly the supplier responses.

E: Technical issues - data migration and environment management

This lessons learned review has been conducted primarily as a non-technical one, focusing on governance, programme management, change and engagement, and so on. A couple of technical aspects have however been raised consistently through the review and are worthy of being captured here.

The first relates to data migration. There is a strong consensus that the programme under-estimated the scale and complexity of migrating data from SAP to MySurrey. This is not to say that data migration was overlooked as it formed a dedicated workstream from the outset of the programme and attention was paid at the programme board to data migration strategy and tools. Observations are:

- The council had a vast amount of data within SAP covering many years that had to be selectively either migrated to MySurrey, archived, or deleted. Extensive work was required to map data within SAP to new fields within MySurrey (recognising that in some cases data is held in different ways between the two systems, for example around multiple staff employments)
- Existing data was of variable quality and therefore required extensive cleansing
- There was some difference of opinion between the council and Unit4 as to the balance of responsibilities for driving the data migration and reconciliation process, leading to some delay and confusion
- Ownership of data within the council was not sufficiently clear in all cases, leading to gaps in requirements, migration and/or cleansing
- Provision, by the Council's Data Strategy team, of a tool called Avature helped significantly in cleansing and reconciling data.

Data migration challenges are very common across council ERP programmes. The lesson learned is for much greater focus from the outset on data, including:

- Being clear about ownership of all relevant data within the council
- Pre-programme data cleansing
- Clearly-defined and understood responsibilities between the council and implementation partner (or data migration specialist, if a third party is used)
- Sophisticated tools to assist with data extraction
- Timely migration so that real data is available to assist with system testing
- Ensuring senior data workstream leadership within the council, working with service teams and the implementation partner, to ensure the right focus and resourcing of migration

A second technical challenge was around system environment management. Providing different environments for build, test, live and so on is a responsibility of the implementation partner with dependencies on Council actions. At times, a number of different environments have to be maintained in parallel. The risk then is a lack of synchronisation between the different environments and a number of interviewees expressed a concern that, as deadlines became compressed, changes being made in one environment were not being replicated in others leading to problems that been identified and apparently fixed then reappearing at a later stage. Environment management and control therefore requires a strong focus within the programme.

F: Aspects of change and engagement

The programme had a structured approach to change and engagement from the outset, with dedicated resource and considerable attention at Board meetings. Significant time was invested in liaising with service departments. A particular instance of good practice was the creation and maintenance of an “advocate” network that engaged about 190 users, with 50-60 regularly attending weekly meetings.

MySurrey has a different look and feel to SAP and for many end-users the extension of self-service meant that they would become system users for the first time. As a consequence it was important that those involved in the design, build and test phases and those who would have end-user roles were fully familiarised with the new system and able to visualise how it would operate.

There is a strong consensus amongst interviewees that familiarisation was not possible until too late in the programme’s lifetime. There had been a conscious decision by Unit4 not to provide a model system, recognising that such a system could only have been a “vanilla” one and may not have helped to familiarise users. Unit4 recognise that this contributed to frustration and challenges because those involved in design and build were unable to obtain a clear visualisation of how a particular process would operate in practice. Delays in the Council in completing the “to be” processes, notably for the HR elements, were also a contributor. This also caused frustration for end-users at training sessions. With hindsight, it may also have been beneficial for key staff to be able to observe the Unit4 system being used live at another council (though Covid may have limited the opportunity for this). The implementation partner has confirmed that it has, with the experience of this programme, now adapted its standard implementation approach, where appropriate, so that certain users are able to see the system much earlier in the process.

After three missed target go-live dates it was inevitable that there would be a sense of fatigue among those involved in the programme and scepticism among the wider user population. Training was provided in the summer of 2022 in anticipation of go-live and this proved premature given the subsequent delay in go-live until the following year. Scepticism may also have been the underlying reason for a failure, among some end-users, to engage in preparation for the new system prior to the actual go-live of June 2023, with some interviewees noting unpreparedness among users who did not appreciate the shift to more self-service functionality. Finally it can be observed that, in the context of three missed go-live dates, the programme team and programme board in the months leading up to the June 2023 target became more and more focused on the technical readiness of the new system, as measured through the testing process, with a squeezing out of attention on communications and engagement. The key lesson learned, though a hard one to achieve in practice, is to maintain a good balance between the preparedness of the system and that of the user community, refreshing and reaffirming the programme’s communications and engagement to overcome, as far as is possible, programme fatigue and scepticism.

The Advocate Network was established from staff across the organisation who would be involved with MySurrey, with roles to act as an ambassador for their service, help cascade information, and facilitate conversations and influence positive change within their team. To enable Advocates to contribute to this lessons learned review, a survey was issued to obtain their feedback. The results are shown in Appendix 3. Advocates generally felt the role to have been effective, citing the weekly meetings, sharing of information, and networking as positives. Advocates also commented negatively on poor or conflicting information being received about issues and fixes and on a lack of training. Their suggested lessons learned echo those of the wider review, with an emphasis on the

engagement of end-user representatives in all aspects of the programme, and on the prompt cascade of information regarding system issues and fixes.

G: Schools

Schools represented a significant user group for the replacement of SAP, with the council supplying financial data to maintained schools and payroll as a traded service to both maintained and many academy schools. At inception there were c450 school payrolls within the scope of the programme.

Many interviewees drew attention to issues experienced by schools as a key lesson learned. There are a number of aspects to this:

- While there was engagement with the school community, schools represent a relatively “hard to reach group” compared to most other users within the implementation; this should be recognised from the outset with a distinct communications and engagement workstream
- Schools had specific requirements for the new system which were not fully identified at the outset, necessitating them to be designed and built into the system at a later stage
- There were challenges in applying the standard self-service model to the way that schools are organised
- As stated in Section A, there was insufficient recognition of deep-rooted weaknesses in functions within the Business Operations area, notably in its payroll service to academy schools. With hindsight the decision to exit from providing payroll services to academies should have been taken prior to the programme commencing.
- Ensuring a stable and high quality payroll service to schools is now a material factor in recovering the reputation of the MySurrey system

In conclusion, organisations embarking on ERP replacement programmes that will have a significant impact on schools should consider from the outset

- The “to-be” business model and make a decision, in consultation with schools, about the extent of functionality to be provided
- Ensure dedicated resourcing of a distinct communications and engagement workstream with schools, scaled to recognise the number of payrolls involved and the “hard-to-reach” nature. Ideally the workstream should draw on some seconded school staff
- Ensure that the design and build of the new system is conducted in full cognizance of the requirements of schools, utilising the knowledge of school-based staff

H: Go-live support model

In any large-scale system implementation the ultimate decision about readiness to go-live is a judgement, taking into account knowledge of the technical readiness of the system, the readiness of the user community, and of the consequences of delay in terms of time and cost. No system is ever 100% perfect, and provision should be made for the resolution of issues and concerns to be raised by users.

Most interviewees felt that, with hindsight, the support model put in place for go-live was inadequate. There are a number of aspects to this:

- The scale of operational issues and preparedness of the support functions had been underestimated; this reflected both some technical issues with the system that needed to be addressed, and also concerns raised by users who were not familiar with what was required of them given the shift to self-service
- There was insufficient resourcing and equipping of helpdesks, with helpdesk staff reporting that they felt overwhelmed by the scale of issues; in addition, there was limited co-ordination between the programme team and the helpdesks in the individual functional areas ie finance, HR, procurement and IT&D and some tension observed between the programme team and those functional teams inheriting the new system
- Initially there was poor management information regarding the issues being raised and so it was difficult for the programme team to see the scale or the trends among the issues being logged and to identify persistently-occurring problem areas

The key lesson learned is to ensure proper planning for go-live scenarios (“hope for the best but plan for the worst”), ensuring close attention on the rapid identification of issues and communication to users of both issues and fixes. Authorities preparing for go-live should also consider whether to engage specialist third party go-live technical and user support resources which provide, at a cost, a more flexible model to respond to peaks in helpdesk demand.

I: People

Section F noted lessons learned around aspects of change and engagement. This closing section notes the impact of the programme on the people engaged at all levels of it.

Given the complexity and challenging nature of programmes such as this, taking place over an extended period of time and with reputational issues as soon as the first go-live target date was missed, the personal impact on people should not be under-estimated with many interviewees noting the level of stress and extent of workload being carried by those engaged in roles across the full breadth of the programme. Looking after the wellbeing of people should be a focus for all organisations embarking on an ERP replacement.

It should also be noted that the programme was delivered against a backdrop of Covid-19, with enforced home working being a feature of the programme's ways of working through 2020 and 2021. The programme adapted to this and Covid appears not to have been a significant disruptor of its progress, but future programmes should consider how to get the best balance in working styles, enabling teams to come together from time to time to exchange ideas, solve problems, and build a strong sense of teamwork.

Appendix 2: Programme History Overview

See separate document.

Appendix 3: Survey of Programme Advocates

Background

As stated in Section F, significant programme time was invested in liaising with service departments and a particular instance of good practice was the creation and maintenance of an “Advocate” network that involved about 190 users, with 50-60 regularly attending weekly meetings. The Advocate Network was established from staff across the organisation who would be involved with MySurrey, with the following roles:

- Understand their service and directorate
- Act as an ambassador for their service and help cascade information
- Facilitate conversations with their team
- See problems as opportunities and influence positive change within their team
- Are trusted and respected, able to motivate others and good problem solvers

Survey

To enable Advocates to contribute to this lessons learned review, a survey was issued to obtain their feedback. The survey was deliberately short and had the following questions:

Based on your personal experience of being involved in the DB&I programme, how effective would you say the role of “Advocate” has been? By “effective” I am thinking about an Advocate’s ability to perform the role. Please rank 1-5 where 5 would be “very effective”.

- *Passing information about MySurrey to colleagues in your team / department*
- *Championing the changes that MySurrey is making in the way colleagues work*
- *Providing feedback to the programme team about issues within your team / department that will impact on the use of MySurrey*

Please briefly list any key factors that influence your scoring:

- *That are positive (ie they helped increase an advocate’s ability)*
- *That are negative (ie they undermined an advocate’s ability)*

Please briefly list any other thoughts you have on the lessons that should be learned from the DB&I programme.

Results

The survey was completed by 27 Advocates, a response rate of approx 14% of the full network but nearly 50% of the more active group attending weekly meetings. While the response rate is not high, it is sufficient for the results to be taken as a reasonable reflection of the views of the Network.

Effectiveness

Advocates generally felt the role to have been effective:

- 85% felt that the role of Advocate was “very” or “somewhat” effective in “passing information about MySurrey to colleagues in your team / department” (8% very or somewhat ineffective)
- 59% felt that the role of Advocate was “very” or “somewhat” effective in “championing the changes that MySurrey is making in the way colleagues work” (30% very or somewhat ineffective)

- 71% felt that the role of Advocate was “very” or “somewhat” effective in “providing feedback to the programme team about issues within your team / department that will impact on the use of MySurrey” (22% very or somewhat ineffective)

While >50%, the relatively lower positive scores for the “championing” role should be noted. Some of the reasons for the lower score can be seen in the further analysis below.

Positive Factors – respondents felt the following helped increase an advocate’s ability (most popular themes):

- The personal contribution of the lead business change analyst for the Network, Crishna Simmons (mentioned favourably in ten responses)
- Weekly meetings, sharing of information
- Networking with colleagues from across the council

Negative Factors - respondents felt the following undermined an advocate’s ability (most popular themes):

- Teething issues and frustration with not being able to get responses to issues being raised
- Poor or conflicting information being received about issues and fixes
- Lack of training – for advocates and end-users

Lessons Learned – respondents provided the following other thoughts on the lessons that should be learned from the DB&I programme (most popular themes):

- The need for end-users in service departments to be involved in scoping requirements for a new system, and in testing the selected one
- The need for more extensive, better quality and better-timed training, for advocates as well as end-users generally
- The need for effective go-live support
- The need for regular and appropriate communications, particularly on issues and fixes

Appendix 4: List of Interviewees

Group	Name	Title
Programme Board	Leigh Whitehouse	Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Resources / Programme Sponsor
	Anna D'Alessandro	Director of Finance, Corporate and Commercial
	Rachel Wigley	Director of Finance Insights and Performance
	Bella Smith	Head of HR Insights, Systems and Governance
	Matt Scott	Chief Information Officer
	Toni Carney	Head of Resources, Adult Social Care
	Mary Burguieres	Assistant Director – Systems & Transformation, Education and Lifelong Learning
	Keith Coleman	Deputy Director of Procurement
	Mark Winton	Internal Audit Manager
Programme Team	Andrew Richards	Programme Director (to September 2022)
	Brendon Kavanagh	Programme Director (from October 2022)
	Julian Pinhey	Change & Engagement Lead (to August 2023)
	Lee Thomas	Programme Manager (from October 2022)
	Sarah Akehurst	PMO Lead (from autumn 2022)
	Andrew Maddison	Project Manager, Transition to Business as Usual (from autumn 2023)
Service Subject Matter Experts	Clare Ford, Monika Mullaney, Linda Whiteman, Joanne Lloyd-Aziz, Laura Benstead	
Suppliers	James Arvin	Director of UK Public Sector & Higher Education, Unit 4
	Emma O'Brien Peter Hall	Managing Director, Embridge Consulting Programme Manager, Embridge Consulting