

CREATING A SUPER CITY: INTEGRATION ISSUES PART 2: THE TECH FILES

integrate /in-ti-greyt/ verb (-ting) to make up, combine, or complete to produce a whole or a larger unit

As part of the establishment and operation of the Auckland Council, the Royal Commission recommends that the information and communication technology (ICT) systems of the 8 councils are unified, and that this will result in:

- A single ICT environment and government framework, operating from a single data centre using common systems and standards
- Unification of existing ICT systems based on the selection of the “best of the best” systems
- Unification of back office functions that “support the core common systems” including resource management planning, payroll, rates management and billing, finance and accounting, procurement and asset management and internal audit
- The single standard processing of transactions (such as the production of rates bills and the processing of consent and licence applications)
- A focus on a high level of customer self-help.

As well as cost savings the Royal Commission identifies other benefits from ICT unification including:

- Increased accessibility to, and transparency of, financial information
- Increased ability for the public to understand and operate within the planning regime
- Increased accessibility to services through web based delivery and automation.

The Royal Commission’s approach to ICT makes a lot of sense, although at a high level ICT unification sounds deceptively straightforward. In practice the Transition Agency, and the Auckland Council, will be faced with considerable hurdles delivering on ICT unification. These include:

- Managing the 8 internal ICT groups effectively so that they contribute positively to the unification process
- Ensuring that the Auckland Council can operate from day one, while progressing with the unification process
- Making key decisions as part of the unification process that are based on the best overall outcome and not unduly influenced by the interests of suppliers or ICT staff who may have a preference for their existing systems
- Managing the pace of the ICT unification. If this is too fast it could be costly and counter-productive. If it is too slow, it could hinder the overall integration of the councils and the benefits of establishing the Auckland Council.

Our view

The task of assessing the best system to adopt for unification is unlikely to be easy. Many factors will need to be considered such as the existing contractual arrangements, functionality and performance, scalability, underlying technology, flexibility, required customisation, life cycle and longevity, support, customer base, substance of the supplier, overall cost of ownership, interoperability, and operation in a widely distributed environment. Also, while the underlying back office systems remain non-unified, the ability to properly assess the best system will not be easy. ICT integration cannot occur in isolation of other changes that must be implemented as part of the Super City integration.

The government would do well to appoint a person with IT expertise to the Transition Agency. This person should be independent and have relevant integration experience. This will help overcome the pressure from suppliers and the potential for "IT politics" to get in the way of an objective approach to the unification.

ICT unification will not be easy and it will not be quick. There is a huge amount of work to do and it will take strong leadership if the Royal Commission's recommendations and objectives in relation to ICT unification are to be achieved.

This article has been prepared for information purposes only and not as legal advice. For further information, please contact:

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