

LOLA COMMUNITY CHARGE BENEFITS SYSTEM (1990)

Introduction

Phil Brown was the Project Manager for development of the LOLA Community Charge Benefits application with Murali Vidyadharan as the Lead Systems Analyst

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Community Charge Benefits system was designed to be an on-line and batch system based on IMS databases, to enable on-line real-time calculations of Community Charge Benefits for Public tenants, Private tenants and owner occupiers. The system was integrated with the LOLA developed Community Charge system and Housing Benefits systems.

Once the user entered data in the Housing Benefits system and calculated the Housing Benefit, clicking a button calculated the linked Community Charge Benefits without having to re-enter the data in the Community Charge Benefits system. This was a complicated facility to develop but delighted the customers as it saved them significant manpower resource.

The Community Charge Benefits system development commenced in 1989 and was implemented successfully to meet the 1 April 1990 statutory deadline, for all 4 London boroughs of Hackney, Haringey, Hillingdon and Tower Hamlets which was a major success story for LOLA.

Much credit was due to all LOLA staff involved in the development and also to the boroughs users who co-operated closely with LOLA staff throughout.

The most innovative facility, enabled on-line retrospective calculations of Housing Benefits back to any date in the past, over unlimited multiple Community Charge Benefit history periods.

The main sub-systems comprised :-

1. **On-line suite of transactions** : comprehensive facilities, including maintenance of Community Charge Benefit records, calculation of Community Charge Benefit, applying account adjustments and setting up Community Charge Benefit overpayments recovery.
2. Weekly batch suite : including the production of Benefit letters to claimants automatically generated and posted. Around 80 letter formats existed, depending on the many reasons for Benefit re-calculation.
3. Bulk Mid-Year Community Charge Benefit recalculation suite : comprising Income Up-rating and up-rated Needs Allowances, normally effective in October each year.
4. Bulk Community Charge Benefit re-calculation suite : based on annual Community Charge increases, normally effective from 1st April each year.
5. Weekly 2-way batch interfaces : with the Community Charge system.
6. Normally statutory changes were announced twice a year by the government and these were successfully incorporated into the system

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7. FOCUS – Data analysis

The system created extract files weekly, providing comprehensive data for user interrogation and analysis using the FOCUS database facilities.

Summary

LOLA Community Charge Benefits system was an innovative system, developed by a highly skilled and motivated team of LOLA staff which utilised the full capabilities of the IMS database architecture and the PL/1 programming language to create comprehensive user-friendly facilities which fully complied with government legislation.

Community Charge was replaced by Council Tax in 1993 and therefore Community Charge and Community Charge Benefits systems ceased on 31st March 1993, though these systems were kept in a restrictive mode for selected users for a further year and then archived.

Murali Vidyadharan
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