



CIVICA

Case Study



Sunderland City Council

Sunderland City Council's Development and Building Control Service continues to go from strength to strength. The Planning Service has gone through a major transformation over the past three years from a Planning Standards Authority to a top performing service to match the authority's Building Control Service. One of the many transformational projects undertaken was the implementation of Civica's electronic document management system including workflow. This system played a key role in the achievement of BSI 9001 Quality Management Systems and also Customer Service Excellence Award.



Steve Hanratty, Performance and Development Manager, Sunderland City Council

Sunderland achieves top 5% place for planning

In 2006 it was clear that Sunderland City Council needed to address a problem in its development control service. Its performance in relation to all categories of planning applications was in the lower quartile, and the Council had been classified as a Planning Standards Authority for CPA purposes, jeopardising its rating as an excellent authority and also its Planning Delivery Grant.

Key changes introduced by Ken Scott, Development Manager which facilitated the transformation of the service were:-

- New leadership structure
- Empowerment of Senior Planners
- Creation of mentors for planning officers
- The development of a comprehensive procedure manual to cover all aspects of service
- Introduction of a Client Manager to lead on all major pre-application enquiries
- Creation of opportunities for career progression
- Introduction of performance management procedures
- Weekly structured management meetings

A lack of clear processes and a standardised approach was creating bottlenecks, and morale within the development control team was low.

By implementing Civica's Electronic Document Management (EDM) and workflow solution the

Council aimed to improve planning application processing performance to the upper quartile and remove the Council from Planning Standards Authority status.

Steve Hanratty, Performance and Development Manager, Sunderland City Council explains: *"If we had allowed the situation to continue it would have affected our overall CPA rating. The government has also introduced new e-planning targets, the Pendleton PARSOL Assessment. When we did our first test against these we only scored 11 out of 21. Allocations of the planning delivery grant were tied to these scores, so we really needed to turn things around."*

Improved accessibility and planning would streamline decision processes and remove bottlenecks wherever possible. A system was required that would remove the need for paper across the service, improve accessibility to planning application files, and help to automatically drive the planning application process.

Jill Hudgell, Sales Director at Civica explains: *"Sunderland needed a solution that could integrate seamlessly with its back office planning system, Sunderland also uses the Planning Portal to facilitate online submission and payment for planning applications. The workflow functionality we offered has enabled Sunderland to make significant efficiency savings"*

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Sunderland City Council currently benefits from using the following Civica solutions



Workflow & Doc. Management



Contact Management



Revenues & Benefits



Housing



Environment



Traffic & Streets



Planning



Finance



Legal



Pensions



Health & Social Care



Education & Skills



Managed Services



Consulting



Software Licensing



Voice Solutions



Internet Solutions



Fleet Management



Service Management

Benefits for staff and citizens

The council implemented the system to improve performance and tangible improvements in the Council's processing of applications, as measured by the Government's Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI) have been achieved across the board. The published statistics for 2007/08 reveal that 93% of major planning applications are now being determined in 13 weeks (an improvement of almost 14% from the previous year, 2006/07), 94% of minor applications are determined in 8 weeks (an increase of almost 10%) and almost 98% of all other applications are now determined in 8 weeks (an improvement of 6%).

As well as the obvious improvements in time and quality, the reduction in paper use and associated positive environmental impact, the new system enables managers to have a better awareness of workloads and performance.

Steve Hanratty explains: *"There have been obvious time and cost savings, as well as a reduction in paper use and other positive environmental effects. The new system enables managers to monitor staff productivity and has led to a new performance management programme, where good workers are rewarded."*

Users can easily find and access any related documents, and less time is being spent looking for files and paperwork. A key benefit is that multiple users can view the same file at the same time. The workflow helps to drive and control the process, which has now been standardised.

Other benefits include:

- Flexibility, enabling our system supervisors to develop and amend process maps without the need for support from Civica
- Reduced time spent looking for files and paperwork
- Early identification of performance issues at either an application or individual level, by means of targets set within each process stage of the system
- Greater security in relation to data retention and business continuity

The system has also created benefits for the general public. Access via the web is easier and all the council's planning applications can be viewed online. To prevent fraud, personal

information is blocked from documents using redaction tools. All documents can be converted to PDF format.

Civica leads the pack

The order was placed in December 2006. Implementation started a week later and the system went live the following April. This short timescale was achieved by the full commitment and dedication of the DMS project team, which consists of Steve Hanratty Project Manager, Toni Sambridge E-Champion/Senior Planner, Mark Errington ICT Project Leader, Richard Smith E-Government Officer, Joanne Angus Office Manager and Paula Hodgson Deputy Officer Manager.

"Civica had the edge in every category but it was the testimony of their existing clients that really swung it for us," says Hanratty.

A key consideration was that Civica's solution has a true workflow approach, unlike its competitors who were just able to show a role based workflow approach. Hanratty says, *"We were 100% certain that Civica could do everything we wanted it to do and could match its competitors, whereas we did not feel the same the other way around. Flexibility and low cost were the other deciding factors."*

Ease of use

Staff took to the system easily, Hanratty says, *"The system is flexible because we've been able to evolve it to suit our needs,"* he adds. *"It has transformed the way development control do things. With planning, there are quite a few set stages you need to go through to get an application approved and signed off, and it has really speeded up that process for us."*

On a weekly basis many application drawings would be sent out to other key stakeholders for consultation. This is no longer required, as all documentation is available via the Internet. *"This has saved money in printing costs as well as the associated time,"* Hanratty says. *"Now that all information is available via the web, the number of enquiries that the service receives has dropped massively."*

"There is an added advantage for the future too, because we now have the perfect platform for flexible, remote and home-working," he concludes.

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