

Sandwell's Vision to Modernise Local Democracy for the Future

"I very much welcome and fully support this development which shows our commitment to modernisation and improved service delivery. This is a vital contribution to our ambitious e-government agenda. This gateway to the Council's decision-making documentation and access to Council policies once again takes a giant step to improving the transparency of the democratic decision-making process".
Councillor Keith Davies, the Council's member champion for e-governance

Sandwell lies at the centre of the largest provincial conurbation in the UK, surrounded by Birmingham, Walsall, Wolverhampton and Dudley. The Metropolitan Borough Council employs 8,245 people.

"We were one of the first Councils in the country to get the thumbs up for a new constitution. The constitution outlines new rules under which Sandwell Council operates and is part of the Government's drive to modernise the way local government operates. It heralded a totally new way of running the Council and a new deal for the public, bringing greater accountability and openness in town hall affairs in order to give local people more say in what goes on."
Mike Keay, Senior Democratic Services Officer, Sandwell MBC

The problem – Giving Councillors and the Public visibility over the Democratic Process

Sandwell MBC needed to make their committee minutes and agendas

available electronically to committee members initially publishing the information via the Council's intranet site.

Sandwell immediately saw the benefits of implementing an established committee management solution that would continually be updated with new features and have support, training and backup.

The Council needed a system to contribute towards more efficient Agenda and Minute management, which allowed: -

- Access to all officers and members
- Reduced printing costs by minimising the number of hard copies produced
- The Committee Team to reduce the time spent on retrieving old documents for other departments

Sandwell MBC also planned to publish their committee information to the public via the Internet and required the system they purchased to encompass this requirement.

The solution – CMIS, Enline's committee management solution.

Sandwell MBC thoroughly evaluated a number of solutions over an 18-month period by checking references, visiting other Councils with committee management systems and having demonstrations from a range of reputable suppliers.

Sandwell MBC selected a solution that answered every part of their problem. CMIS from Enline plc addresses the need for Member

Services staff to more effectively manage the democratic process and framework, including current legislation.

Members and Citizens alike may access information from home, work or any public access point (for example local libraries or kiosks) within Security parameters set by the Authority. In line with the vision of e-Democracy, citizens can review and comment directly on the Authority's forward plans and gain feedback.

The introduction of the Management Information System (CMIS) for the Council's democratic processes will allow all decision-making documentation (agendas, reports and records of decisions) to be accessible across the Internet. The initiative will be significant in assisting the Council to meet the targets with regard to e-government set for local authorities by Central Government and in meeting the Chief Executive and Leader's dream of 'taking the decision-making process into the homes of the constituents'.

It will also enable the Council to become more sustainable by reducing its printing budgets via the facility for the despatch of electronic agenda and reports.

As well as CMIS' existing capabilities Sandwell MBC chose the solution because it is constantly being developed, with input from the CMIS User Group.

Enline worked in partnership with Sandwell MBC to help them get 'buy in' from the future users of CMIS. Enline presented to over 20 members of Sandwell from heads of service, officers, members to the Deputy Leader of the Council to introduce and promote the product to help ensure the smooth implementation and take up of CMIS within the Council.

- Has fully automated email functionality to inform members of changes, meetings etc
- Allows the Council to manipulate the layout of the page to incorporate the Councils branding, layout etc.
- CMIS Version 4 is installed quickly and easily, with the least disruption to the end user as possible.

Future expansion of CMIS will be driven by user feedback via the User Group, legislative drivers and input from the Enline team.

"CMIS is the type of system which once seen sells itself but what clinches the deal for me is the commitment given to the customer by Enline plc in establishing a national user group to support the local authorities who use CMIS to continue to be at the forefront of the e-government revolution.

The benefits – Meeting every requirement

Version 4.0 of CMIS is compliant with the Government Interoperability standard as defined in the E-GIF directives issues by the office of the E-Envoy.

- Version 4.0 has been developed as an XML based application.
- Meets IeG criteria
- Allow Councils to securely publish minutes and agendas
- Ease of administration
- The Sandwell community will be able to see the whole Democratic process, and give feedback.
- Provides a good return on investment by cutting down the amount of paper based information created by the Council.

Future Plans

Sandwell MBC intend to run CMIS on their Intranet until all end users feel comfortable working with it. They will then extend the information to the public by making it available via the Internet. This will be launched in September 2003.

Sandwell have a vision for the regional adoption of CMIS, and are looking to promote it to other Authorities in the surrounding areas.

I am very pleased to have been given the opportunity by my colleagues on the User Group to play a leading role in this collaborative initiative."

Dave Haywood, Assistant Democratic Services Manager, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, CMIS User Group Chair 2003.

