

Promoting sustainability through digital archiving at the London Borough of Islington



“It obviously creates a problem if a paper file is mislaid. Electronic access gives us and our leaseholders rapid access to information without compromising the physical security of the original document.”

Doug Goldring, Director of Operations for Homes for Islington

Background

Islington is one of London's inner-city boroughs and an area of significant social contrast, where some 55% of the population lives in council housing alongside wealthy owner-occupiers in houses worth several million pounds. To help bridge the digital divide, Islington has installed wireless access to the Internet and is piloting its own digital TV service so that local people will be able to access council services from their homes, using their TV.

The Challenge

Meeting the challenge of on line service delivery requires a different way of working. The council's IT and technology department, Technology Solutions Group (TSG), has led the way in organizational change, with several projects aimed at maximising existing resources and improving services, as well as creating a more dynamic, smarter, and more flexible working environment for staff.

TSG calculated that the council could achieve significant savings by reducing its office footprint. At a conservative estimate, it costs about £6000 per annum to maintain a single desk space in this part of London, money that could be better spent on front-line services.

By introducing wireless network access, plus flexible working with hot desking and people working at home or on the move, TSG has successfully doubled its number of employees working in the same space over the past three years. Currently, the group has 110 people based in office space previously occupied by 65.

The Solution

Dependence on paper documents was a challenge to change. People couldn't easily work from home because they needed access to centrally-held paper files and bulky paper files took up expensive office space.

The council decided to pilot and test a paper-free model of working. It chose Xerox's Web-based enterprise content management (ECM) software, DocuShare, which was installed and is managed by the council's long-standing outsourcing partner, Xerox Global Services. The council also replaced individual desktop printers with Xerox multifunction devices (MFDs), which can copy, print, and scan.

The first phase of the DocuShare installation was piloted in the council's Student Support Services department, and involved scanning and archiving 350,000 pages, which can now be searched online and accessed by staff.

By summer 2007, DocuShare servers were holding about 1.2 million documents ranging from single-page letters to 100-page leases. Stored documents include items such as indexes to birth, marriage, and deaths registers, parking appeals, tenancy files and council tax files.

Electronic and paper files are loaded daily, directly from the user's desktop via central scanning through local MFDs. The council expects to have 500 active DocuShare users by the end of 2007.

It is vital for the council to be able to locate and retrieve information quickly and efficiently because it needs to comply with the UK's Freedom of Information Act. This Act came into force on 1 January 2005 and gives anyone the legal right to ask for and be given any information that is held by a public authority. Public authorities must comply with the request and provide the information within 20 working days.

TSG staff are encouraged to scan documents for storage into DocuShare and to retrieve them electronically using DocuShare's powerful search facility. Rapid online retrieval has significantly sped up service to members of the public who request documents under the Freedom of Information Act, with response times greatly reduced — in some cases from weeks to days.

The Results

Using DocuShare, the Islington Council has successfully created a model for smart, paperless working that can now be rolled out into any of its ten departments, and which delivers measurable financial, environmental, and social benefits.

Paper-free working has already saved the council hundreds of thousands of pounds and removed vast quantities of paper from its operations. It estimates that using digital archiving for 250,000 pages will save 12 square metres of space costing £2,400 annually. And when documents are printed out, it costs just 1p per page on an MFD compared with 11p on a personal printer. These efficiencies helped the council to save £8 million in 2007 and consequently residents of Islington pay one of the lowest council taxes in London.

The ability to work on the same file at the same time is improving efficiency and decision making within council teams. It also allows easier consolidation of teams and further streamlining of working procedures in

the pursuit of superior service delivery. And there is now zero risk of misfiling, losing, or accidentally destroying scanned files, with backup and business continuity protocols in place.

Digital archiving also has big benefits for the environment, by significantly reducing the council's printed output and saving paper and energy. Home-based workers also reduce traffic congestion and pollution, helping the council achieve its objectives for a greener Islington.

The opportunities created by paper-free working also deliver visible social benefits for the local community. According to the council, more flexible working patterns supported by electronic document management will create new jobs for local people, especially those individuals who, for various reasons, are not able to work in an office; they can now be recruited, trained, and equipped to work from home.

The council also envisions building closer relationships with its residents and local businesses, by providing public, log in-secured Web access to advanced document management services over the Internet via the wireless network.

The Future

The council is now set to become one of the UK's most significant users of DocuShare, as it rolls out document conversion across its ten departments. The long-term vision is that the vast majority of documents stored by the council will be converted into searchable, digital documents, enabling smart working in all departments and sustainable improvements in customer services. And with a digital archive of historic documents from across the council, easily accessed from anywhere in Islington over wireless IP network, Islington Council will be able to set even higher standards of performance and create new and innovative services for its residents.

Case Study Snapshot

The Challenge

- It was costing the Council approximately £6,000 per annum to maintain a single desk in London, money which could be better spent on front-line services
- In order to allow more flexible working the Council was keen to reduce dependence on centrally-held paper files
- Compliance with the UK Freedom of Information Act meant the Council needed to provide access to public information within 20 days

The Solution

- Implementation and ongoing management of Xerox's web-based enterprise content management (ECM) software, DocuShare with back-up and business continuity protocols in place
- Replacement of individual desktop printers with Xerox multi-functional devices

The Results

- By the close of 2007 there were 500 active ECM users and over 1.2 million documents hosted on DocuShare servers
- Removal of vast quantities of paper and more efficient processes have enabled the Council to save hundreds of thousands of pounds annually
- Improved service quality with zero risk of misfiling, losing or accidentally destroying scanned files
- Environmental benefits through reductions in paper, energy usage and travelling time

About Xerox Global Services. We transform business processes through more effective document management; every week, our 30 global delivery centers process more than 15 million business-critical document images. Organizations outsource a range of business processes to us, including financial, administrative, client acquisition and account opening, and office and print centre optimization. Across marketing, legal, finance and HR, they trust our expertise and the experience of our dedicated global delivery staff to cut the cost and improve the speed of their operations.

For more information on how we help public sector organisations, visit www.xerox.co.uk

