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Case Study

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How Powys County Council implemented Electronic Document Management and Workflow from Comino to help bring together its rural locations allowing for better customer service and clarity of processes. Other benefits include:

- a 19 per cent reduction in the time taken to process new benefits claims
- an eight per cent increase in Council Tax cash flow
- improved communication between Powys' three main revenues and benefits offices based up to 40 miles apart

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Andrew Durant,
assistant revenues and
benefits manager at
Powys County Council

Bringing the community closer



About Powys County Council

Powys is an extensive and extremely rural county covering 2000 square miles, occupying about a quarter of Wales. With only one person for every ten acres it is one of the most sparsely populated local authority areas in England and Wales, with a population of just 120,000.

The county has tremendous landscape assets, from the dramatic mountains of the Brecon Beacons National Park and the rolling hills of Radnor Forest to the Berwyn Mountains in the north, and some of Britain's most spectacular river valleys - the Severn, Wye and Usk - sweeping through its glorious scenery.

Powys County Council covers five main town centres and, due to its rurality, has three separate services for revenues and benefits, based at the three offices. With the north office being 40 miles away and the south office 20 miles away from the central office, Powys has a lot of ground to cover.

Wide spread problem, local solution

At the end of 2004, Powys County Council began to evaluate its processes and decided that to eliminate the paper chase and consolidate its systems, it would need to bring its files online and manage all new claims electronically. Powys' objectives were to clear the backlog of paper files building up in its offices and meet the requirements of the Modernising Government Agenda.

Andrew Durant, assistant revenues and benefits manager at Powys County Council takes up the story: "We wanted a solution that would help us bring our rural offices together to enable cross-team working and to improve cost-effectiveness.

"We were a fully paper-based organisation, with nothing electronic in place to help us manage our workload. The organisation was keen to adopt technology that would help to reduce processing times and make us more efficient."



A proven solution

"We were not after groundbreaking, new technology where we would be used as the guinea pigs," comments Durant. "What we were looking for was a low risk, feature rich, stable solution that had already been proven in the market."

After securing DWP Performance Standards funding, which was matched by the Welsh Assembly IEG Projects fund, Powys developed a business case detailing what it wanted to achieve from the solution and issued an invitation to tender. Following a thorough evaluation of all the submitted tenders, Powys decided on Comino's Electronic Document Management (EDM) and Workflow solution.

"Comino's EDM and Workflow fitted well with our requirements and we were impressed by Comino's market share in the industry, proving that it was a company on top of its game," explains Durant.

The Comino system makes it easier for councils to meet a number of electronic Government requirements, whilst streamlining processes and improving overall security. Access to records is restricted by authorisation rights and can be achieved from an officer's desktop, significantly reducing the daily paper chase. The system also enables cross-team working, ideal for Powys' widespread office locations.

Transformation

"I have worked on between ten and 15 system implementations since I started working here and this has been by far the smoothest. It was delivered on time and within budget and the staff have taken to it like ducks to water," enthuses Durant.

The system has been live for 12 months and Powys County Council has experienced a number of benefits for its staff members, operations, and the local communities it serves during this time.

"We have been transformed," comments Durant. "We have consolidated our processes and are now running as one service as opposed to three

separate ones across the district. We are able to e-manage our workload, reducing processing times and responding to citizens a lot quicker."

Powys has also noticed quantifiable benefits since the implementation including a 19 per cent reduction in time it takes to process new benefits claims. Durant expands, "According to the original business case for implementing EDM and workflow, we wanted to achieve 10 per cent reduction in new claims processing, so to achieve 19 per cent is fantastic. "We have also increased council tax cash flow by eight per cent and can now target work to allow for efficiency."

Backlog management has improved across the departments and Powys has been given a clearer insight into dealing with priority working. "Now we are able to cope better when members of staff go on leave or during particularly busy periods, such as Christmas. Before, we had to physically move files or even members of staff to cover someone else's workload, but now it is just a matter of logging on and accessing whichever file you need," enthuses Durant. "This also allows us to introduce homeworking, which has been welcomed by staff."

In terms of customer facing benefits, Comino has removed the disparity of having three offices working across three different locations. Before, members of the community had to contact a specific office every time they wanted to make a claim or had an enquiry. This meant that if phone lines were already tied up, the customer wouldn't immediately be able to get through. Now, Powys has been able to install call routing, confident that wherever the call gets picked up, the staff member who answers will be able to access the right information from their computer.

A wider take-off

With one already successful implementation completed, Powys is now planning on rolling the solution out across its pensions department using the infrastructure that has already been put in place.

"There's a real chance that the Comino system will be adopted across the Council, which would be fantastic considering the success we have so far," concludes Durant.



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