

Tendring saves £150,000 per annum with Idox e-Planning



Introduction

Tendring District Council is located in Essex, South East England with a population of 148,000 citizens. The authority handles almost 9,000 planning consultations and over 8,000 responses a year in conjunction with many consultees of which Essex County Highways deal with the largest number.

Analysing the process

Each planning application received by a local planning authority normally results in a number of consultations. These consultations are issued to neighbours, county and parish councils, Environment Agency, National Heritage and utility companies such as gas, electricity and water companies.

Traditionally all consultations were issued by post and this resulted in significant costs associated with the production of multiple copies of the planning documentation as well as the costs of postage.

The delays associated with the issue and receipt of paper files also impacted on the planning process. The automation of these processes provides the potential for significant cost and service benefits as Tendring discovered.

Procurement

From 2006-2009 Tendring invested significantly in integrated Electronic Document Management (EDMS) and Public Access/Consultee Access solutions from Idox with the intention of using technology and best practice to help achieve their objectives of transforming their services.

Key goals were to reduce costs, make time savings and lessen the impact on the environment.

In 2006 Tendring had an automated back office but were primarily paper based in terms of how they dealt with consultees and the public. This project was designed to see how far Tendring could go to eliminate the use of paper from the processes.

Preparation and deployment

A lot of time was spent preparing for the implementation of Consultee Access by setting up a trial project with Tendring's most frequent consultee, Essex County Council Highways as well as internal service consultees. This trial was a real success and paved the way for a full implementation.

Essex County Highways department have been using the system since October 2008 and the whole system went live in January 2009.

Tendring also wrote to all their external consultees setting out the plans, advising them of the benefits, advising them of how the system works and what to do if they have difficulties. Tendring experienced very few, if any, issues and managed to deal with all queries promptly. In fact Tendring were amazed how easy this was.

Tendring were careful to ensure that some traditional channels for responding to consultations were not cut off so left open the traditional email and hard copy services.

Key achievements

- > Overall savings attributable to implement e-Planning project with Idox calculated as approximately £150,000 per annum
- > 99% of planning consultations are now handled electronically
- > £8,000 per year is saved on postage alone
- > Savings on printing and photocopying costs whilst lessening the loads on the environment.
- > Value for money analysis demonstrates £15,000 saved using Idox Consultee Access with integrated Idox EDMS

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routes as some consultees prefer to respond using their own official medium and in some cases attach reports etc. Most consultations however are now routed via Idox Consultee Access.

Gaining maximum benefit

Tendring wanted to make the best use of technology so have configured their Idox back office system to automatically generate consultations electronically where the consultation record contains an email address. This uses a special template which prints to email rather than a printer. The consultation mail contains all relevant details of the planning proposal plus a hyperlink to enable the consultee to view and comment on the proposal on Tendring's web site.

This is working very well because it has enabled Tendring as a local planning authority, to tailor the service to their local and national consultees. Tendring believe it is really important to be able have this level of flexibility in the services offered.

Outcomes and Achievements

Tendring have recently undergone an internal value for money (VFM) analysis relating to the project and can clearly demonstrate that from April 2009 have issued in excess of 3,400 planning consultations,

99% of which have been handled electronically – all of which all would have been paper based prior to then.

Tendring have also saved an estimated £8,000 per annum on postage alone.

Internal staff are spending less time involved in the processes of printing and packaging planning documents for consultees. Savings on the costs of printing materials, photocopying and stationery are being made whilst lessening the load on the environment.

Between 2007 and 2009 customer contacts of all types halved with 24,700 less contacts and personal visits to the offices reduced by 12,800 meaning substantial less journeys by private transport and the knock on benefits of reduced congestion and the environmental impact.

Overall e-Planning savings with Idox have been assessed in the order of £150,000 per annum as calculated as a result of an audit undertaken with the finance department. The audit assessed the costs undertaking planning related tasks before and after the introduction of e-Planning into the authority and includes direct and indirect costs.

Tendring
District Council



"Idox are significant partners with the Council and our investment in Idox e-Planning has paid dividends by transforming the way we do business both economically and from the customer service perspective"

Nigel Goodier, Executive Manager,
Tendring Council Planning Service.

"Consultee Access has saved considerable time in producing our responses to the Local Planning Authority and has allowed us to reduce our own filing systems due to the easy access to ours and other consultee's responses"

Vicky Presland, District Manager,
East Area Highways Office of
Essex County Council



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