

Teignbridge District Council - “Reaching the Remote” with Distributed Mandoforms

Teignbridge is a largely rural district covering 260 square miles situated on the south coast of Devon. This encompasses the area between Exeter and Torquay, the eastern part of Dartmoor and the areas to the south and west of Exeter. The main inland towns are Newton Abbot and Buckfastleigh. Seaside towns include Dawlish and Teignmouth which provide an important source of income through tourism. The District boasts a population of nearly 120,000, of which 21.6% are over the age of 65. This causes consequent problems for both Health and Social Services partners to address.

Teignbridge District Council’s largest service by volume and value is Revenues & Benefits. Much of the work involves collating information, via forms or original documentation, and conducting face-to-face interviews. A “Benefits Take Up” campaign conducted jointly by Teignbridge District Council, Devon County Council Welfare Rights Unit and the Citizens Advice Bureaux, identified that face-to-face individual contact was the most effective way of engaging those most in need, and providing a valuable service. There have been many pilot implementations of technology over the years to address this, with varying success. However, Teignbridge are confident that a new approach can accomplish the objective of a greater take-up of services.

Teignbridge are leading The Teignbridge Community Planning Alliance (TCPA) which is a loose grouping of most of the local government and voluntary bodies in the Teignbridge area. As a Local e-Government Partnership it applied for, and received, a grant from the ODPM to pursue a number of projects to benefit the wider community.

One of the projects was called “Reaching the Remote”, and IDOX was pleased to be a part of the more visible aspects of this project. “Reaching the Remote” was a community-orientated Benefits take-up initiative focusing on enabling citizens to take advantage of Benefits services without

having to visit the Council offices. By allowing staff to bring the services to the clients via home visits, the necessity is removed for them to make the journey into Forde House for assistance and advice.

The Reaching the Remote project:

- enabled teleworking for staff in the Benefits department
- equips Members with ICT, and acted as a model approach for other Teignbridge District Council (TDC) services and outlying service-delivery points.

In the summer of 2003, Teignbridge District Council selected Mandoforms, the leading supplier of e-forms to local government, to address its corporate online e-forms requirements. The selection of Mandoforms was also dependent on the requirements of the “Reaching the Remote” project.

Mandoforms partner for the West & Wales (Associated Consultants Limited) was brought in to help with the implementation of the project.

Mandoforms make deploying and using forms cost effective, simple and accessible. Unlike traditional online forms, Mandoforms are intelligent, using navigation rules to ask relevant questions based on data already entered, thus saving time. This is especially important in a Benefits environment, where the size the complexity of the form is onerous. Mandoforms also validate data entry so that if information keyed in by the user is incomplete or inaccurate the form immediately signals this, cutting entry errors.

How this works in practice

The same Benefits form can be deployed on the Council’s internet site, as well as other ‘online’ channels such as a PDA, laptop or a public kiosk. Most importantly, Mandoforms was selected for its offline capability, extending the reach of its functionality, without the requirement to deploy new software or forms for remote access.



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Council officers can take an electronic Housing Benefit form on a laptop computer out into the field for home visits. The form presented can be a completely new form, or it may be an amended existing form, for example, in a case where circumstances may have changed.

The data is captured or updated at each visit, with the client present, saving the results locally onto the laptop PC. A copy of the form is then printed at the client's home and signed in situ. For an existing form, the data can be pre-populated before a visit, so there is no requirement for the officer to re-enter information already captured in the Housing Benefit System. On return to the office or at another convenient location, the computer is connected to the Council's wide area network. The Offline Mandoforms software on the laptop will synchronise with the central Mandoforms Enterprise Server and process the form, saving the data into a central database. An email is created from the form content to indicate to the Benefits Manager that an application has arrived. A PDF version of the completed form is also created for processing and record keeping purposes.

“The level of service provided to the public will increase greatly, completion rates of forms will be much quicker and data errors are eliminated due to the intelligence behind the forms.”

Andrew Fraser, CEO at IDOX

Elara integration software, from IDOX partner, Metascybe Systems Limited, polls the central database on a timed batch basis. When a new record is detected, Elara processes the record data and automatically pushes it into the Housing Benefit system using the same interface that a keyboard operator would use to enter the data. The Housing Benefit system then processes the

data in the same way as if it had been entered manually, including error handling.

“By deploying Mandoforms from IDOX, Teignbridge District Council's Revenues & Benefits Department is able to operate more effectively,” said Andrew Fraser, CEO at IDOX. “The level of service provided to the public increases, completion rates of forms becomes quicker and data errors are eliminated due to the intelligence behind the forms”.

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