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EDM Group CASE STUDY:

The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea



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Planning on Success – EDM helps Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea council take planning documents online

The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea planning department has successfully converted up to 2 million of its planning documents with the help of the EDM Group. EDM converted the documents into digital files at their processing facility in Bristol and uploaded the files to *EDM online*, an online document management solution.

Many of the documents – some dating back as far the 1940s – can now be accessed at the click of a button by members of the public, via the council's website provided the information is not sensitive or confidential, and all can be accessed by the council's planning officers.

Saving time, space and money

EDM began working with Kensington and Chelsea in 2003 on another document conversion project to convert large amounts of planning documentation and associated correspondence dating from the mid-1990s onto microfiche. In 2006 EDM was re-contracted and the decision was made to convert all historical files to digital format at one of EDM's conversion bureaux for retrieval via their *EDM online* service. *EDM online* is a comprehensive document management system enabling the storage and retrieval of important and regularly accessed documents.

EDM Group was tasked with converting historical planning department documents from a variety of existing formats into digital files. This was a complex process of categorising, indexing and scanning huge numbers of documents. These included photos, technical drawings and typed or hand-written reports of planning applications, pre-applications, letters, pavement crossovers and public inquiries and were stored on multiple formats including microfiche, CD-ROM and hard-copy paper documents in a range of sizes from small letter writing paper up to A0.

A significant proportion of this involved converting the council's Statutory Register – a register of all council planning decisions ever taken – from microfiche into digital.

These documents took up large amounts of storage space in the council's building which was both costly and inconvenient. Older paper documents were also prone to deterioration and damage, rendering them useless in the future. Finally, they posed a significant logistical problem for council officers when trying to get quick access the files they needed.

Easy access to the past

Janette White, Head of Support Services, explains, "In the planning department historical documents are incredibly important. For many new planning enquiries it is essential that we review what complaints or issues may have arisen in the past and what decisions were made. Having quick and accurate access to this information is vital. Previously, our planning officers would have to search through large storage rooms to locate the relevant file then sift through long paper documents or old microfiche slides to get the information they required. Bringing these documents online has eliminated this inefficient process."

All of the council's planning officers can now access historical documents directly from their desktop using *EDM online*. They can also search within large individual documents to access a specific section. This function was achieved through a meticulous categorising and indexing process when the documents were converted to digital format.

Ms White continues, "Before the hard copy documents and files left our building they had to be sorted and categorised so that they could be uploaded correctly onto *EDM online*. This was a crucial part of the project and to ensure that it ran smoothly EDM dedicated over 100 man hours to support us at Kensington and Chelsea's offices."

The files were then transported to EDM's processing centre in Bristol.

Empowering the citizen

A further benefit of the project has been the ability to make the documents available to members of the public. *EDM online* has been seamlessly integrated into the back-end of the Kensington and Chelsea website, ensuring that citizens can access planning documents with the same speed and efficiency as planning officers.

The planning section of the website is the second most popular part of Kensington and Chelsea's website and attracts thousands of hits per month.

Ms White concludes, "The benefits of moving documents online are numerous - the convenience to users, accuracy of the search function, quality of print and display and the speed of retrieval compared to paper documents or microfiche will make a real difference to the way in which the department functions."

Find out more...

EDM Group is one of the UK's leading providers of document management services and solutions. EDM's services include:

- Document scanning from paper, film and fiche documents
- Electronic mailroom
- Online document hosting and
- Business Process Management solutions.

To find out more about the subject of this Case Study or any aspect of EDM's services and the customers who successfully use them, visit

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