



SUCCESS STORIES

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL DELIVERS EDMS AND E-GOVERNMENT SERVICES ON NETWORK APPLIANCE™ TECHNOLOGY



“The NetApp unified storage solution delivered absolutely the best value, meeting all of our EDMS criteria, from performance to connectivity, scalability, and disaster recovery. Because of its inherent flexibility, the NetApp technology is turning out to be the cornerstone of our infrastructure.”

EMAN AL-HILLAWI EDMS Project Manager, Development Directorate, Birmingham City Council

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Location Birmingham, England

Industry Government

Customer Profile

Birmingham City Council is Europe's largest council, employing 55,000 staff and providing services to more than one million citizens. The city is home to 430 schools and three universities (www.birmingham.gov.uk).

The Challenge

The need to conserve space, improve document control/access, streamline workflows, and meet e-government objectives led the council to pursue an electronic document management solution (EDMS).

The Solution

Birmingham City Council deployed an EDMS based on NetApp storage technology. NetApp enables fast document access, scalability, DR, and long-term flexibility.

Benefits

- 24x7 customer satisfaction
- Reduced costs
- Safe and resilient DR
- E-government compliance
- Future-proof architecture

THE CUSTOMER

Birmingham City Council is Europe's largest council, employing some 55,000 staff and providing services to more than one million citizens. The city of Birmingham is home to 430 schools and three universities. Long recognised for its industrial contributions, Birmingham boasts a revitalised city centre that serves up a lively mix of art, music, shopping, and cultural events. The city has earned a record-breaking 14 consecutive gold medals from the Flower Show and National Britain in Bloom events (source: www.birmingham.gov.uk).

THE CHALLENGE

Improve Citizen Services while Reducing Costs and Meeting E-government Targets

To say Birmingham City Council had a paperwork problem would be an understatement. With multiple libraries already packed full and new documents arriving at the rate of 800 per day for planning applications alone, the council faced constantly escalating records management, storage, and retrieval costs.

Eman Al-Hillawi, EDMS project manager, says that the full extent of the storage problem was driven home during an office

move for Planning and Urban Design to a new facility. “We had to dedicate a full floor to our physical archive. The limited availability and rising costs of real estate made recovery and conservation of office space a critical business driver.

“We wanted to improve service to citizens. With paper files, only one council employee at a time can hold the master version of a document. That makes it difficult for other staff members to have timely access to all of the latest materials they need to make decisions. And, as you can imagine, when you're handling large quantities of paper documents, there will inevitably be misfiled documents and even the occasional loss. All of that adds up to delays in service delivery to customers and citizens.”

THE SOLUTION

Standardise on Network Appliance Unified Storage Solution for EDMS

The council conducted an extensive evaluation—including both professionally contracted and in-house benchmark testing—of competitive storage solutions. “The NetApp unified storage solution met all of our criteria, from performance to connectivity, scalability, and disaster recovery,” explains Andrew Jones, server manager. “NetApp gave us the best value.”

“There are other good products out there, but NetApp gives us the greatest capability to meet our current and future project requirements. Most importantly, however, both inside and outside the council, our customers are seeing the benefits. This solution gives them access to more information than ever before—much more readily and much more easily”

ANDREW JONES Server Manager, Birmingham City Council

Today, a NetApp FAS920 system serves as primary storage for the council's document management solution based on EMC Documentum software. The council deployed the solution across both the Planning and the Urban Design service areas. All paper documents coming into these business areas are now scanned and indexed into the EDMS system. To date, 150,000+ documents from planning applications, project documents, drawings, photographs, specifications, and other documents have been stored electronically. The NetApp solution also supports the addition of AutoCAD images, voice files, and video recordings. Some 1500 council users access Windows® file and Documentum data based on Oracle® on the NetApp solution.

To ensure rapid recovery of files and databases in the event of a disaster, the council intends to utilise NetApp SnapMirror® software to automatically replicate information to a NetApp NearStore® R200 system, with a current capacity of 16TB of data. They will be implementing a FAS920 cluster very soon to further increase resilience and availability.

BUSINESS BENEFITS

Responsive Service, Flexibility for Council and E-government Initiatives, and Cost Savings

Whether it's reviewing an application for a house extension or examining plans for a massive retail park, council staff can immediately access accurate and up-to-date documents. “In the past,” comments Al-Hillawi, “it might have taken days for a staff member to gather all the needed documents. Now, because council teams—including local and remote users—can collaborate and review documents online throughout the project lifecycle, prompt recommendations are the norm.

“Our business areas are measured against key performance indicators (KPIs)—with attendant rewards and penalties—related to processing and turnaround times. For example, we must register and respond to every planning application within three days. This system not only streamlines document processing, it also gives us better visibility so that we can efficiently manage workflows to ensure responsive service.”

Al-Hillawi says that EDMS is also enabling the council to implement a planning statutory register solution that makes documents available via the Internet. “The EDMS empowers us to achieve e-government objectives such as the Pendleton

Criteria, a national driver to meet electronic delivery standards for planning services. Without the EDMS, we would not have been able to meet these objectives and would have risked losing the monetary benefits of government grants linked to compliance.”

Because the EDMS is a core business system—that is, critical business areas cannot function if it is unavailable—reliability of the solution was essential. “We were able to have five back out plans in case anything went wrong and we had to revert to the previous version,” says Al-Hillawi. “It was only possible to do that thanks to NetApp. It was great being able to test our rollbacks during the week to make sure that they would work if things didn't go as planned. So, we're seeing the benefits of this technology in many ways.”

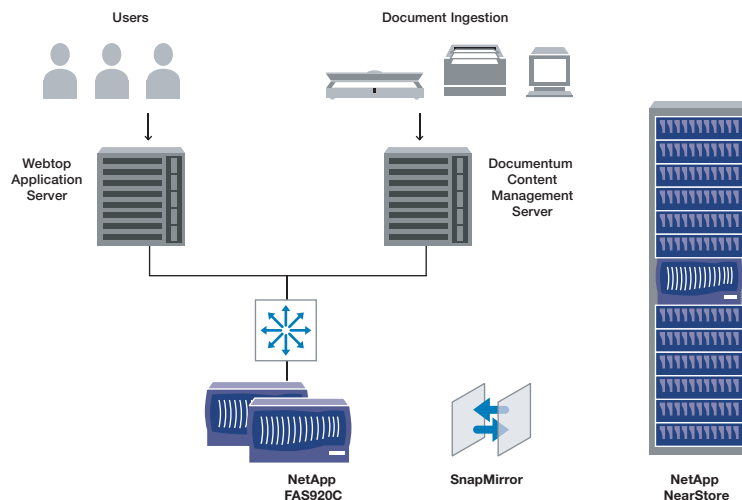
The high-availability NetApp platform combined with NetApp Snapmirror technology will help to ensure business continuity. Philip Degg, Development Manager, Development Directorate, explains, “Our Oracle Database administrator has been happily surprised at the speed of backup and recovery. Using Snapshot technology to make point-in-time copies ensures that we can roll back almost instantaneously to a known good copy. That's invaluable during development processes.”

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EMAN AL-HILLAWI EDMS Project Manager, Development Directorate, Birmingham City Council

NetApp SnapMirror software enables automatic replication of documents to a NetApp R200, a capability the council will leverage for remote disaster recovery. Degg elaborates, “We plan to deploy Sun™ servers next to the R200 so that if there is a data centre failure, we can break the SnapMirror image, attach those servers to the R200 and temporarily run off that system with minimum break in service.”

The council has started to realise cost savings by implementing a single, simple-to-administer storage architecture that delivers multitier data protection and disaster recovery. “We actually install the application and Oracle Home and data files on the NetApp system and protect them, as well as our document data, utilising Snapshot and SnapMirror technology to make local and remote backup copies. In the event of a Sun server failure, we can simply mount the appropriate volume from our NetApp system to a replacement server and instantly bring up a new database server, or Web server—whatever we need. The NetApp system gives us tremendous flexibility and operational resiliency.”



Birmingham City Council eDMS Storage Architecture

The council utilize a FAS920c to consolidate their primary data for Documentum and user file storage. Snapshot technology is used to provide fast/efficient backup and restore. The data is also replicated via SnapMirror to a NearStore R200 platform for disaster recovery.

Degg says that support for multiple protocols was another benefit of the NetApp solution. “The city is in the process of developing its long-term strategy for enterprise storage. Because NetApp supports all major protocols—iSCSI, FC, NFS, CIFS—we know that our EDMS will integrate seamlessly into the city’s infrastructure, whatever it turns out to be.”

On-the-fly scalability allows virtually instant and unlimited document storage without infringing on limited office space. This seamless scalability, combined with NetApp Data ONTAP® 7G software with FlexVol™ technology, gives the council tremendous flexibility for future growth and application requirements. The NetApp technology allows the council to add and reapportion storage capacity as needed, and it provides a migration path to grid technology.

“The NetApp solution is becoming the building block, the cornerstone for our infrastructure,” adds Andrew Jones. “Some of our colleagues in Learning and Culture, for example, have seen the benefits of NetApp and have implemented a solution based on a FAS940 system.

“Our own plans include adding SQL Server applications and expanding the EDMS to other areas such as Human Resources. In HR, for example, archiving costs have increased by 7% in the past year. Using the NetApp-based eDMSEDMS solution based on NetApp to archive records associated with attrition will enable almost immediate recovery of those costs. The NetApp and Documentum platform will also give us excellent layers of security to protect access to sensitive records, a key criterion as we expand the solution into areas such as HR.

“There are other good products out there, but NetApp gives us the greatest capability to meet our current and future project requirements. It was clearly the best value for the money—other products would have tied us down. The NetApp team also takes the refreshing approach of showing you that the solution works, not just telling you about it. They have been supportive throughout the project. Most importantly, however, both inside and outside the council, our customers are seeing the benefits. This solution gives them access to more information than ever before—much more readily and much more easily.”

SOLUTION COMPONENTS

FAS920c,
R200 systems,
NetApp SnapMirror, and
MultiStore software



www.netapp.com

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