

# Innovation in the Community Legal Service

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## **Annex 1 – Bassetlaw Information Service Communication Using IT (BISCUIT) (Bassetlaw District Council & Nottinghamshire Rural Community Council)**

### **Aims and objectives**

The aim of the 'BISCUIT' project was to work with a partnership of service providers to establish a network of service 'hubs' and videolink access points, in order to improve the accessibility of advice and information services in rural areas. This would enable local people to receive advice and complete relevant documentation electronically without leaving their local community.

### **Background and rationale**

The district of Bassetlaw is very rural. The region itself is – at some 250 square miles – relatively large but not populous, so that many of its communities are very isolated. It contains a number of former pit communities and there are some deprived areas. It is widely recognised that it can be very expensive to ensure that people in rural areas have full access to the range of services that people living in more urban areas enjoy.

The BISCUIT project grew out of an earlier project through which the District and County Councils worked with local advice organisations (including the CAB, the Welfare Rights Service and Trading Standards) to set up a multi agency one-stop shop in Retford. The challenge was then to work out how to serve all of the surrounding rural communities.

There was therefore a history of partnership working and a shared desire to make services more accessible. The PIB project has provided the means to build on this, supporting the e-government agenda by investigating the use of videolink technology as one way of providing advice in rural areas.

The BISCUIT project was awarded £215,000 of PIB funding and began in January 2002.

### **Set-up and operation**

#### *Resources*

PIB funding has contributed to purchasing and supporting the videolink system, and other project costs. The technology used by the project is the Telly Talk system. The project looked at the system of interactive videolink used in the Lewisham PIB project, and particularly liked the potential for viewing and completing forms, as well as for taking photos of clients (e.g. for 'blue badge' disabled driver forms), making it much more fully interactive.

The technology is supported under a maintenance contract with Telly Talk, and by Nottingham Rural Community Council who provides immediate IT support through their in-house technician. Bassetlaw District Council has also begun to use its own in-house IT services as well to support the project.

While match funding for the project has mainly been in-kind through management time and a contribution to overheads, the District Council has also contributed financially to fund a connection with the CAB.

The first task of the project was to identify the organisations and agencies that would provide the necessary links to the local communities to promote the service. It was seen as essential that these links be made with voluntary and community organisations, which it was felt would engage more successfully with residents than local government organisations.

These groups – including voluntary groups, local IT groups, parish groups and village councils – were keen to get involved with the project. The initiative would bring obvious benefits to local communities, and they were proud to be part of introducing a service into their area that exploited relatively new technology.

While establishing these partnerships, consideration was given to where the videolink access points should be set up. Access points were placed in a range of locations, focusing on deprived areas, where it had been established that people already went to use other services, and included libraries and village halls.

The project undertook limited publicity in the early stages, including raising awareness of the service among local people via the District Council's free publication, Bassetlaw News, which is distributed to all residents. Marketing activity increased as the service expanded and became able to support a wider range of needs (such as making forms available electronically). More recent publicity has included a leaflet about the service to all households.

### *Sessions*

The main BISCUIT access points are open 9am-5am Monday to Friday. There is always an adviser at the 'hub' service points (such as Retford One Stop Shop). Clients access services on a drop-in basis. At most access points, there is a community volunteer who can provide assistance. Where it is difficult to establish which service a client needs, they will usually be connected to the One Stop Shop whose staff, if they cannot themselves help, will know where to refer the client.

## **Impacts**

### *Impacts for the clients*

BISCUIT is on course to meet its targets for clients accessing the service. Over 2,600 people have used the project's videolink services since the project began, and over 120 people have been trained to operate the system. The videolink has increased the number of queries and raised the profile of the involved organisations. Older people appear to trust the face-to-face service videolink provides.

### *Impacts on partners*

Bassetlaw District Council has become more involved with the project as time has gone by, in particular through providing support with managing the project and ensuring that all administrative requirements are met. The Council is considering using videolink technology internally as part of its Customer Relationship Management programme.

### *Wider impacts*

A significant impact has been the project's success in attracting other funding in order to expand services further. Shortly after being awarded PIB funding, the New Opportunities Fund enabled the project to expand by a further four access points, and more recently the Countryside Agency has funded an access point in a post office. This has resulted in a broader partnership of funders, services and local groups, and, crucially, more rural communities being able to access videolink services. Other organisations are now talking to BISCUIT with a view to becoming involved.

### **Challenges, lessons learnt and critical success factors**

Over time the bulk of administrative responsibility for the project has been moved from Nottingham Rural Community Council - which was leading on developing the partnership of providers and local groups, and so had limited capacity to carry out other aspects of the project - to Bassetlaw District Council. While the District Council were keen for the project to remain as independent of it as possible, in order that it was seen as genuinely multi-agency and owned by the voluntary and community sector, ultimately it recognised that it was in the best position to support this work.

Working in partnership with various local groups has posed challenges. Each brings its own approach and methods of working, and some have found it hard to treat targets like achieving the Quality Mark as a priority issue. This will continue to present a challenge for the project as more groups become involved.

The main problem faced by the project has been the link from the Retford One Stop Shop to the CAB. The CAB needed match funding which to its surprise it failed to get, leading to delays. Then the manager of the CAB went on long-term sick leave. The CAB also had some of its funding withdrawn on service quality grounds and had to close for a time. The match funding has however now been secured.

The BISCUIT project is developing an understanding of why it has been successful. It views the location of access points as critical, citing relatively high levels of deprivation and existing usage of access point venues as key characteristics of the most popular sites. Having a volunteer on hand to provide support is also important.

Technology is clearly important in a project of this kind. Project partners considered the available alternatives very carefully. Ease of use was seen as very important, particularly as some of the videolink sites, such as those in village halls, would have no one on hand to show people how to use the technology.

With different groups joining the project at different times, BISCUIT have become aware of the importance of informing new partners about funding arrangements and administrative responsibilities. It has also not proved feasible to hold monthly meetings between all partners, as distances are large and available time limited.

With hindsight, BISCUIT believes it might have benefited from setting more realistic targets for the initial stages and from building in more resource for project management, perhaps in the shape of a full-time co-ordinator.

### **Future plans**

The financial future of the project has been secured through Bassetlaw District Council. BISCUIT is now built into the strategic plan, with the intention that no resident should live more than three miles from an access point. It is also anticipated that the services will be rolled out into more urban areas, which may include linking up with local hospitals.

The project is keen to involve more agencies, and possibly solicitors with Legal Services Commission contracts, for whom it believes this kind of approach to working with clients in rural areas would be more cost-effective than more traditional outreach work.

It also intends to introduce 'Telly Talk Light' technology, which enables people connected to the internet who need support (e.g. with completing an online form) to speak to someone immediately.

## **Annex – 2 Wirral Wired (*Bebington CAB*)**

### **Aims and objectives**

The Wirral Wired project aimed to expand an existing videolink service; to research and develop an electronic referral system (including a directory and an electronic diary); to produce and support a Wirral CLSP website; to research and develop the provision of advice and legal help over the internet; to develop an electronic communication system for the CLSP in Wirral; and to research and develop electronic information sharing facilities for the CLSP.

In particular the project prioritises service delivery to clients who do not or cannot access direct face-to-face advice services, especially older people, young people, people with disabilities or those who live at a distance from services.

### **Background and rationale**

The PIB project was set up to expand a videolink advice service developed by Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council with EU funding. As a result of this initiative, ICT Learning Suites (with videolink facilities) had been set up in local libraries, and the Borough Council had invited the CAB to pilot a videolink advice service from a library. This worked well, so links from the CAB were established with the other access points. The CAB successfully bid for Lottery funding for two IT technical posts, and two specialist caseworkers. PIB funding has enabled further expansion of the project.

The Wirral area is fairly affluent, but with pockets of severe deprivation (Merseyside is an Objective 1 EU Regeneration area). The area suffers from a lack of LSC contracts, so the videolink has targeted this unmet need

Bebington CAB was awarded a PIB grant from the LSC for £336,323 over three years.

### **Set-up and operation**

#### *Resources*

PIB funding pays for staff time and development costs to take forward the aims of the project. Other funding covers the cost of the advisers, all of whom are experienced.

The infrastructure was already in place, with access points being located within a 10-mile radius. The main objective of the project was therefore to expand and develop the services available, mainly by publicising the service and by researching links with new partners.

The project team undertook weekly site visits across the area, which succeeded in raising awareness and encouraging usage. The project team also gave presentations and demonstrations to interested agencies, and hosted visits from organisations such as Liverpool Translating and Interpreting Service, Sure Start Birkenhead, Speke CAB, Manchester Advice, Durham City Council and North Cornwall CAB Consortium.

A leaflet and a poster were designed to promote the services in access point locations. The most effective tool for advertising the service has been a window sticker with the CAB logo, displayed at libraries and other access point locations.

### *Sessions*

The videolink service is run on a drop-in basis, and is generally available between 9.30am and 5.30pm. The Bureau itself closes at 3.30pm, meaning that advice services can be available to people who would not be able to use the direct face-to-face services.

### **Impacts**

The Wirral Wired project has been making a significant contribution to meeting local advice needs, both before and since PIB funding was awarded.

#### *Impacts for the clients*

The project has provided advice through video technology to approximately 1,200 clients over three years. Used in combination with email advice, videolink has saved clients an estimated 2,400 miles in travel.

Videolink services have resulted in advice being more accessible for a significant number of people on the Wirral peninsula. Bebington CAB itself covers a large area, extending to the Cheshire border some five miles away. Many Birkenhead residents come to Bebington to do their shopping, so there is considerable demand for advice services here (especially as Birkenhead CAB operates on an appointment basis, whereas Bebington does not).

In summary, the project has enabled clients to access help and advice through a new medium, and one which they may not have heard of or felt comfortable with before.

#### *Impacts on the CAB*

The videolink technology seems to have increased the total number of enquiries to the CAB, without reducing the number of telephone or direct face-to-face enquiries.

#### *Wider impacts*

Bebington CAB was approached by the Appeals Service as part of a pilot scheme to use videolink technology to enable people to appear at tribunals. Both parties were keen to take the partnership forward. The equipment used by the appeals service was of significantly higher quality than that used by the CAB, but a working relationship was possible. The first appeals via videolink took place in November 2002, with successful results.

Wirral Wired has also become involved with a Royal National Institute for the Deaf project to provide deaf clients with access to interpreters via videolink. Deaf clients have used this service successfully.

The project also works with local schools (which all have broadband connections supplied by the Council) helping them to fulfil their obligations under the citizenship

curriculum. Wirral MBC has absorbed the cost of the connection, as it has much less impact on their budget than on that of the CAB.

Availability of advice via videolink played a notable part in Wirral MBC being awarded Beacon Status for Community Legal Services.

### **Challenges, lessons learnt and critical success factors**

While the project has in general had a positive experience of the videolink technology, there have been some specific challenges. At the beginning, the technology used by the CAB was of inferior quality to that used by the Appeals Service, with whom they were establishing a link. The organisations could still work together but the situation was not ideal. The CAB later borrowed a portable unit from the Appeals Service which was of much higher quality. The CAB subsequently used lottery funding to buy the better equipment so the two organisations are now matched.

The Council had equipped schools and the new videolink access points for the general public with higher specification (broadband) connections than the CAB had. The Council has since absorbed the costs of upgrading the CAB's equipment to be fully compatible.

Initial Lottery funding provided for IT support has proved invaluable to the success of the project, as has having someone on hand to deal with the day-to-day running of the system at the access points. This is reflected in the relatively low numbers of clients using the service where there were no trained personnel. When the staff on site were trained and willing to encourage the use of the video technology, usage has been much higher.

One of the key success factors of this project has been the enthusiasm and spirit of partnership shown by those working on the project.

### **Future plans**

The project will be continuing beyond the PIB funding period as it has secured a further two years funding from the Community Fund. Key areas of focus will be furthering links with schools and continuing the work that has been done on tribunals. Another planned initiative is the development of a pilot scheme that uses videolink to offer advice to prisoners.

The recent conversion of connections to broadband 3-way chat is expected to make for smoother advice sessions whereby a client can have an expert present without having to re-dial and make a new connection.

## **Annex 3 - Lewisham Telly Talk (*Lewisham CAB*)**

### **Aims and objectives**

The aim of this project was to employ a co-ordinator who would expand, develop and target the Telly Talk videolink service operating in the London Borough of Lewisham. The co-ordinator would increase the number of advice sessions where Telly Talk was available and would target first time users of advice services. In particular the project aimed to reach people who would not normally use the CAB's services to see if videolink technology could be used to encourage them to access advice services. The project would focus on areas of the Borough identified as having a high need for advice but low levels of provision.

### **Background and rationale**

As part of an existing Council initiative to support better access to advice for excluded groups, there were already 18 videolink access points operating in the Borough. These were located in areas like Council neighbourhood offices and libraries. Various organisations including the CAB were engaged in this project. The intention was that PIB funding would fund the Telly Talk service co-ordinator. The funding would also help to improve access to services in the north of the Borough, where there was less provision, and where the way this relatively new technology worked in practice could be assessed.

The role of the co-ordinator was to raise awareness of the Telly Talk service, particularly among the target groups (people with disabilities, single parents, young people and older people); to deliver advice; to train other advice workers to use the system; and to provide administrative support such as recording relevant statistics.

The project was awarded PIB funding of £88,765 for a period of 24 months beginning in January 2002, but closed in June 2003 owing to operational problems, particularly with the technology.

### **Set-up and operation**

#### *Resources*

PIB funding covered the cost of employing a co-ordinator for the Telly Talk service. The videolink technology and computers and licence were funded by other means. The CAB provided 25% match funding in-kind. This included contributions in terms of information system, insurance, training for staff, information and resources.

Much was done in terms of advertising. There were leaflet drops, presentations, publicity material sent to libraries and links made with the local press. There was also some very targeted promotional work carried out in the course of the project, such as two weeks spent targeting single parents.

#### *Sessions*

Advice was given on a drop-in basis. A client could go into a booth and choose to speak to, say, the CAB, or to the Housing Benefit department, or Inland Revenue. While some

access points for legal advice were available for use all the time, the CAB advertised a number of fixed sessions per week, so that clients knew when they could access the CAB

The videolink advice service at the CAB was staffed mainly by volunteers, as the PIB grant did not provide for other staff time. As part of his role, the co-ordinator ran basic training to show advisers how to use the technology. Occasionally the co-ordinator would deliver advice in the absence of volunteers. An adviser without a current videolink client could be getting on with other work, such as writing up case records.

The videolink at the CAB was originally to be housed in the same room as its telephone advice service. However, it was then decided that the videolink service would need to be located in a separate room, as the technology picked up all the background conversation, with implications for confidentiality.

## **Impacts**

### *Impacts for the clients*

It has been difficult for the project to establish the positive impact of its videolink service for clients, mainly as a result of the ongoing issues it has faced, particularly with regard to the technology (see 'Challenges and lessons' below). However, it is worth noting that the project believes that clients did not have a problem with the idea of using new technology per se. For example, clients are now asking for advice via email.

### *Impacts on the CAB*

As a result of the very effective promotional work that the co-ordinator undertook, the project has succeeded in raising awareness of the CAB's services. Many people say in feedback that they have heard about the CAB by word-of-mouth such as through friends.

The CAB now has experience of working with a particular kind of videolink technology, which received a mixed response from advisers working with it. Some advisers, especially those who also liked giving telephone advice, liked it, perhaps because they were afraid they would find a client's presence in the room challenging or threatening. Others disliked it, mainly because connections were often broken mid-session.

There have been considerable negative impacts on the Bureau (see 'Challenges and lessons' below).

### *Wider impacts*

The CAB is now using videolink technology to deliver advice to Carers Lewisham. This stems from work begun by the co-ordinator during the PIB project, and would not have happened without it (see 'Future plans' below).

## **Challenges and lessons learnt**

Part of the rationale for the project was to investigate the use of technology in the delivery of advice: the technology used was therefore a critical element. That the system

seemed not to function as well as it should was considered one of the major reasons for the project's failure.

The CAB had no control over the technology, which had already been chosen and installed in other locations by the London Borough of Lewisham. The picture quality of the videolink was thought poor, and the system often crashed, preventing people from connecting to CAB services. Despite efforts by the CAB to resolve the problem, the issue persisted. A system upgrade in January 2003 caused particular problems. The CAB felt it had had insufficient notice to inform clients that the service would not be available for two weeks. Clients therefore continued to try to use it, which generated bad feeling about the service.

One of the sites was located in local council offices a short walk from the Catford location where the CAB videolink advice service was based. If the system was down at the council office, people would come to the CAB to complain.

There were also other access issues, since the set-up of the system meant that people from the other links could only get to the CAB adviser one at a time. Clients were therefore placed in a queuing system, which was very unpopular.

Staffing issues also presented problems. The project relied on volunteer advisers, of whom there were not enough, particularly during the summer period. This meant that the co-ordinator had to spend more time giving advice than had been anticipated and could not continue the intended promotional activities.

In general it was felt that the poor system performance and the resulting negative word-of-mouth publicity detracted from the positive start the CAB had made in terms of awareness raising and marketing.

The CAB believes that, as a very urban area, Lewisham may not be a suitable location for projects of this type.

The project closed early in June 2003. There were two main reasons for this: the service did not appear to be fulfilling its potential, and the project co-ordinator had been appointed to a new job. It was felt that the disruption to the project while trying to recruit somebody new would not be worth the time or effort, given the ongoing issues with the technology.

The CAB believes that a key consideration in the delivery of any similar project would be considerable consultation at the start, in order to be better informed about what the technology can deliver, and the use of benchmarking to assess effectiveness.

### **Future plans**

As the project has already finished, the plans for the future involve building on partnerships gained through work on the PIB, rather than continuing with the PIB itself. A videolink has been established with Carers Lewisham, an organisation with 4,000 members who can book an individual appointment to talk to an adviser. It is felt that this kind of partnership, with an organisation whose members may not easily be able to seek direct face-to-face advice, is perhaps the best use of the technology.

## **Annex 4 – East Riding Citizenlink Project (East Riding of Yorkshire Council and partners)**

### **Aims and objectives**

The Citizenlink initiative aims to provide access to a range of advice and information services via videolink technology, and thus to improve public access to good quality legal services, particularly for socially excluded members of the community.

### **Background and rationale**

The East Riding is an area of 100 square miles. It is largely rural in nature, with 173 towns and parishes, few of them with a population above 10,000 people. Transport links in the area are not good and, although the area is not one that has been identified as having high levels of need for legal services, accessing traditional face-to-face services can be difficult for a large proportion of the community.

In 1996, public service providers led by the East Riding of Yorkshire Council started working together to make their services more accessible and integrated. Six Customer Service Centres (council one-stop shops) were established, each fitted with videolink technology.

### **Set-up and operation**

#### *Resources*

The LSC provided initial capital funding for the project, and revenue funded the service up to 2003-4. Other funding has come from the then Lord Chancellor's Department, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and the Yorkshire Development Board. LSC contracts tailored to fit with the videolink service were set up with providers (local solicitors and CAB advisers), which since 2004-5 have been mainstreamed into standard LSC contracts. Prospective partners wishing to link into the service now pay for the associated equipment and must contribute to running costs.

The project has achieved the CLS Quality Mark at General Help level.

### **Sessions**

A system has been set up whereby a client's first contact is with a general adviser, who will take details of the problem and direct the client to the most appropriate adviser. If that adviser is part of the videolink network, an appointment will be made for the client to take part in a videoconference. Software has been developed to manage these appointments, as the advisers operate on a rota system. For people connecting from a kiosk in a Customer Service Centre, an adviser is available 24 hours a day, with appointments normally made for the following day. As with traditional services, there is a certain level of missed appointments, but overall the appointment system appears to work well, with good feedback from providers. For people using a stand alone booth (kiosks not located in a Customer Service Centre) the 'open door' button triggers an automatic videolink connection to the call centre with an adviser appearing on screen.

Another element to the system is a customer database feedback system. When a repeat client calls in, their details are automatically displayed (e.g. any disabilities or special needs, history of previous calls); this also creates a clear audit trail.

The Citizenlink initiative has developed and changed considerably since its original conception. In an initial six-month pilot, members of the public could make use of local Customer Service Centres and three stand-alone booths to access the services of three Citizens Advice Bureaux, a law centre, local LSC-contracted solicitors' offices and Humberside police. Legal advice focused on employment, housing and family law. There was some use of the videolink in this period, but it did not prove to be very popular, perhaps on account of perceived social stigma attached to obtaining legal information and advice. This may have been a particular issue with the booth sited within a local supermarket, as users may have felt that they were likely to be recognised by other members of the community, although it was also thought that people may prefer not to combine seeking legal advice with supermarket shopping.

However, since connecting up with Customer Service Centres – thereby providing a service that appears broader than purely 'legal' – the project has become a great success. The Citizenlink infrastructure now includes 14 Customer Service Centres, 19 stand alone booths and two mobile libraries, and is committed to providing services for people within 3km of where they live. In the main, legal advice given relates to welfare benefit, debt, employment, housing and domestic violence.

## **Impacts**

### *Impacts for clients*

The use of videolink technology within a rural area to provide increased access to services appears to be highly successful, and could be used as a model for future projects.

Citizenlink services have been receiving around 400,000 enquiries each year. Access points located in Customer Service Centres have been particularly popular, which may reflect both the fact that these locations are identified with receiving advice, and that there are staff to help if necessary.

The most popular stand-alone booths are located in areas of highest deprivation, with low car ownership and poor public transport. They are popular with older people, who apparently value the face-to-face aspect of the service.

### *Other impacts*

Citizenlink has been awarded the Charter Mark for service excellence. The initiative was also the principal reason for the Council being awarded Beacon status in Community Legal Services. Citizenlink now owns the intellectual property rights to the system it uses, enabling it to develop the software in the most effective way.

Citizenlink believes one of its main successes has been in developing partnerships with a wide range of services, such as hospitals and the Department for Work and Pensions.

### **Challenges, lessons learnt and critical success factors**

There were early problems with the referral system, where people would need to be connected to a service, such as a solicitors' firm, which had no one available at that time. To resolve this, an electronic diary was set up: call centre staff now fill in available slots two weeks in advance.

It was important to ensure that partners with a range of different characteristics could be integrated into the system. Citizenlink therefore combines a range of technologies (such as ISDN lines, broadband and mobiles) and benefits from intensive IT support.

Citizenlink has also identified several critical success factors:

- the target audience or community is one which experiences difficulty in accessing traditional services (e.g. face-to-face);
- the technology has been set up so as to be 'non-threatening' to the users, and with support readily available;
- the technology is robust and reliable and also capable of being updated when necessary (it is important that the technology - both hardware and software - is capable of lasting for several years without significant updates);
- a wide range of services is offered, helping to overcome any perceived social stigma, as well as providing economies of scale; and
- kiosks are located in places that are commonly visited and easy to access, in areas of high deprivation, low car ownership and poor public transport.

### **Future plans**

Having developed links with ODPM, Hull City Council, the Patient Advice and Liaison Service, the Pension Service, the Courts Service and Connexions, Citizenlink is now hoping to work with other partners such as magistrates' courts, prisons and the Probation Service.