

Breaking down departmental barriers

Fingal County Council

The Challenge

- Share information more effectively between departments
- Deliver a joined up service for citizens
- Improve operational efficiency

The Benefits

- Easy access to cross-departmental data to support decision making
- The ability to respond quickly and accurately to customer queries
- Time and cost savings



The Customer

Fingal County Council is situated to the north of the city of Dublin. It has responsibility for an area of 452.7 km² and a population of 273,051 people.

The Challenge

Like most councils in the Republic of Ireland and beyond, Fingal County Council has always had a fairly traditional structure, with separate departments for each of its service areas. These departments had no means of sharing data easily and, more often than not, worked in complete isolation from each other.

When David O'Connor came to office as Fingal's new County Manager, he made it his mission to break down the barriers and improve communication between departments. *"I felt that an enormous amount of potential could be released by the whole organisation talking to itself,"* he says. *"It's about creating a completely connected, communicating organisation with an understanding and respect across the divides of the different divisions we have – all focused on delivering the ultimate best service for the people we serve."*

The IT department at Fingal County Council realised that geographic information system (GIS) solutions had the power to break down the council's departmental silos and help deliver the "connected, communicating organisation" that the County Manager desired.

The Solution

The council had been using Esri GIS technology for several years and had already deployed several innovative GIS-based solutions. In this new initiative, it used Esri's ArcGIS Server technology and ArcGIS for Flex application programming interface (API) to draw together data from multiple departments and make it all accessible via maps on the council intranet.

Called Just Maps!, the application is very simple to use and is accessible to all of the council's employees. A welcome 'dashboard' greets users and presents a menu of service areas, ranging from housing to environmental services. When users click on the area that they are interested in, they can undertake searches for information, by text box or by location, perform a range of other map-based tasks and view their data on a selection of different scale maps of Fingal.

The real advantage of the application is that it allows users to access data from multiple service areas and display information from the transport department layered on top of data from the planning department, for example. Previously, it would have taken days or longer to consolidate and share data across multiple departments, but now it can be accessed instantly. GIS manager Hazel Farley says: *"For the first time, it is really easy for data to be viewed and shared cross-departmentally."*

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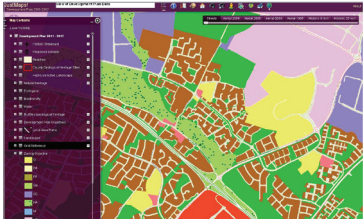
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“With the introduction of our new intranet-based GIS service, we now have the ability to get people to consider everything that the organisation is doing in a geographical area and deliver a seamless service for citizens.”

David O'Connor, Fingal County Manager



JustMaps! Development Plan

All of the data that makes up JustMaps! is streamed to the application from internal and external sources using web services. Even the base mapping from Ordnance Survey Ireland (OSi) is streamed live to the intranet application via the OSi's MapGenie service. Consequently, users can be assured that the data displayed in JustMaps! is always the most up-to-date available.

Benefits

GIS is helping to usher in a new era of cross-departmental collaboration at Fingal County Council. With its JustMaps! application, the council expects to be able to deliver a higher standard of service to citizens, reduce costs and operate more efficiently. For example, if employees in the water department share data with employees in the traffic department, road works and water pipe maintenance in the same street can be planned at the same time. Fewer holes need to be dug, which saves time and money, but also minimises disruption to commuters and local residents.



Historic Mapping Swipe Tool

The availability of shared data also helps to improve decision making. For example, if the environment department wants to locate a new land fill site, it can quickly and easily consider a wider range of factors, including planning applications in the area, information on housing and roads, the local development plan, historical imagery of the area and more. By evaluating all of the data at the council's disposal, the environment department can quickly come up with proposals that are more likely to attain local and national approval.

Employees can now perform GIS queries whenever they need to, while a customer is on the phone if necessary. This enables the council to provide a much more prompt and responsive service for citizens – and it is more cost effective too. In time, Farley estimates that the GIS team may get as many as 80% fewer requests for GIS queries, because employees can access the information they need themselves. This significant time saving in the GIS department will lead to corresponding reductions in costs.

“You can get an enormous amount of benefit from working cross-departmentally,” says Fingal's County Manager. *“With the introduction of our new intranet-based GIS service, we now have the ability to get people to consider everything that the organisation is doing in a geographical area and deliver a seamless service for citizens.”*

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