



## Council Relocation and Rationalisation Programme

*“A brilliant example of planning and execution delivered ahead of schedule”*

Nigel Summers (Chief Executive)



Sandwell Council House, Oldbury

**The relocation of 1000 council staff and Members from twelve buildings to a new civic centre was the catalyst for the implementation of rationalisation programmes in this west midlands metropolitan borough council.**

Stephen Wright,\* a management consultant was engaged by Nigel Summers, the Chief Executive of Sandwell Council, to provide planning and project management assistance for the relocation of the council to a new civic centre. The engagement commenced some nine months prior to the move date, enabling services such as removals and procurement of furniture and furnishings to be put out to tender in accordance with government and European legislation, and to identify and implement a number of rationalisation and cost reduction projects.

The approach adopted was tailored to meet the council’s limited budget. Stephen set up an internal planning team of departmental managers to identify, plan and progress each sub-project under Stephen’s guidance. In excess of 35 sub-projects were developed using MS Project, including the identification of unit locations and floor layouts, filing, storage, building access, staff and building security, IT networks, equipment and phones, and a communications plan that covered in house bulletins, press announcements and council office advertising. All sub-project plans were linked to identify the critical path, the ‘earliest’ move date and subsequent dates when the diary provided a ‘window of opportunity’ for the move. The preferred move date was the August Bank Holiday week-end when the council would be closed to the public for four days (in the event, only three days were required to complete the move).

The confirmation of the move date had a galvanising impact on the building construction contractors and acted as a spur for everyone involved on the project to complete their projects on time. Two weeks prior to the actual move, staff and Member visits to the new site were arranged so that they would be familiar with the building and facilities, and would look forward to the move enthusiastically.

As construction works progressed Stephen held frequent meetings with the architect, building contractors, departmental managers, IT department managers, external suppliers



and the Council's Chief Executive to identify and manage risks as they arose and to ensure everyone was working towards a successful conclusion. At the same time, Stephen focussed on rationalisation programmes.

Over the years the council had accumulated a huge storage of documents that were held in the council's basement archives, deep storage and office filing systems. Stephen instigated a programme to identify, and reduce the volume that needed to be retained and relocated to the new building. The **Document Archive Audit** revealed that many of the documents were more than 100 years old with many in a very fragile state but, as legal documents, the information needed to be retained. The audit still enabled a 70% reduction in archived / stored documents and a 65% reduction in documents and files held in the office, thus significantly reducing the relocation and future document management costs. With retained files properly identified, the creation of better storage management and retrieval processes was possible. Further space savings were also achieved through **electronic imaging** and the development of a document management solution for electronic access and retrieval of essential documents has improved the efficiency of business processes and workflows.

As part of the IT relocation, an **Equipment and Print Audit** was also undertaken to identify:

- the inventory and status of current leased and owned equipment,
- the requirements in the new building for printing and management of documents (unit volumes, printing, copying, faxing, accessing, etc.), and,
- the most appropriate print input and output equipment and locations around the new building.

By centralising the procurement process significant savings were achieved in the total cost of ownership of leased /owned equipment and enabled provision of units with greater accessibility, equipment reliability, reduced noise levels and other environmental benefits.

**The office relocation involved more than 800 officers and 200 members and was completed as planned in three days over an August bank holiday week-end.**

*\* Stephen Wright is a director of EMLW Consultancy Limited (Contact: 07899 920133). EMLW Consultancy Ltd provides tendered consultancy and contractor services.*