

## New 'Help Points' increase access to services

Bassetlaw District Council has created a network of videoconferencing suites (known as Help Points) across its mainly rural 250 square miles area. Under its acronym **BISCUIT** (Bassetlaw Information Services Communicating Using IT), the initiative grew out of the council's plan to improve services with communities outside the towns of Retford and Worksop.



'Our priority as a council has always been how we reach out our services to all these areas,' says Head of Customer Services, Steve Brown. 'There are several pockets of deprivation and in many cases the rural nature of the area can make that worse. This is especially true of those dependent on public transport. Our challenge is to get out there and provide the services – but placing council employees into the communities would be expensive.'

Videoconferencing was the ideal solution. 'Not everyone is comfortable using the Internet. We wanted to present a halfway-house solution, where you are still able to see someone face to face but are using technology to improve delivery.'

The project identified the following outputs/milestones to be achieved by the end of 2004. The actual outputs demonstrate the very real impact of this project.

BISCUIT Outcomes	Target	Actual
Number of Videoconferencing Sites Established	6	11
Number of users	2,000 (2003) 6,000 (2004)	7,600
Number of staff trained	20	72
Number of Surgeries	12	15
External Funding	None set	£306,000

One of the key outcomes of the project is that:

- ▶ No resident to be more than three miles away from a Help Point by the end of 2005

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