

## BESPOKE SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT

### MICROSOFT APPLICATION SOLUTIONS:

Microsoft Content Management Server



### CUSTOMER PROFILE

Darlington Borough Council is a unitary authority responsible for providing all of the municipal services within the area that it represents, delivering to approximately 100,000 residents within its boundaries.

Employing 4,500 people, the council has four departments; Children's Services, Community Services, Development and Environment and Corporate Services.

## Providing a clearer picture

"We are very pleased that Darlington Borough Council has acted on its obligation to create an accessible website and work towards the 'See it Right' logo. There are two million people in the UK with sight problems and others with other disabilities affecting website accessibility, so we are urging companies to appreciate that good design can make websites, information materials, goods and services and buildings accessible to this huge market."

Peter Stubbs, Technology Officer, RNIB in Darlington

### THE CHALLENGE

UK law requires that all organisations providing access to services online must ensure that disabled users are not discriminated against. Darlington Borough Council already hosted a large dynamic website and needed to make sure that it was fully accessible for disabled users.

To demonstrate its commitment to accessibility for all, the council decided to work towards achieving an official stamp of approval from the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) for the entire corporate website. Achieving compliance is a significant undertaking and required revisions to over 1,500 pages, several third party products and numerous interactive applications.

### IMPLEMENTATION

Waterstons liaised extensively with software providers Microsoft, Tagish, Agathos and with the RNIB on Darlington Borough Council's behalf to:

- Ensure that 3rd party products complied with accessibility standards.
- Provide automated tools that allow the Council to monitor the content they write for accessibility issues.
- Integrate these tools into a familiar working environment by producing a customised version of Microsoft Content Management Server, used by the Council to handle online content.

- Gain feedback from two visually impaired residents of Darlington who acted as testers throughout the development stage.
- Provide workshops and guidelines for Council staff on writing for accessibility.
- Prepare website content for use with nongraphical browsers, such as screen readers and text-only browsers.
- Make extensive changes to the current website architecture to ensure compliance with the RNIB's standard – "See It Right".

### POTENTIAL REALISED

- Darlington Borough Council has been able to meet its target of producing a website that meets government accessibility expectations and falls in line with the current UK Disability Discrimination Act 1995 requirements.
- Website information and services now reach a larger target audience; content is much easier to understand for users with a variety of conditions.
- The need for customer services to assist users with the website and services has decreased, leaving more time available for other tasks.



## More Information

### What is Accessibility?

“Accessibility” means making sure that services are equally usable by all, including those with disabilities. Conventional examples of accessibility include the provision of wheelchair ramps or hearing loops to ensure that disabled customers can gain access to information or premises. However, accessibility also applies to online or electronic services, where some disabled users may experience genuine problems trying to gain access to information.

### Differing user requirements

There are 9.8 million disabled people in Britain (one in seven people) so it is important to understand the range of issues which accessibility aims to rectify and the reasons for those issues. These vary hugely based on the user’s individual needs:

- One million people in the UK are registered or eligible to be registered as blind or partially sighted. Blind users are reliant on screen-reading software which reads text aloud, and therefore experience a website in very different way to a sighted user. Many innocuous-looking websites become completely incomprehensible to blind users because of poorly-thought out screen designs, navigation and continuity. Blind users find the website much easier to navigate if the information is properly labelled and keyboard shortcuts are provided which allow users to skip repetitive information such as navigation bars. Deciding on the most appropriate way to render images accessible to blind users requires some careful thought.

- One in 12 men and one in 200 women have some form of colour blindness. The Colour-blind users may miss important elements of your website if you rely on colour alone to indicate the purpose of an item, as changes in colour may not be easily perceived.
- Visually impaired users may use screen-magnification software to view a website, so the page design must be robust enough to cope with different text sizes or magnification levels without rendering information unreachable.
- Many users require extremely good colour contrasts in order to read text easily. Sticking to international standards on both colour and brightness contrast will alleviate this problem.
- Users with restricted movement or poor motor control (as well as blind users) may be unable to use a mouse, so pages should be constructed to allow keyboard access.

### Accessibility Standards

There are several different sets of guidelines dictating some “minimum” accessibility standards. The closest to an international standard is laid down by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), the body which sets standards for the web. The W3C’s Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) has compiled comprehensive lists of accessibility criteria, covering three different levels of accessibility:

- **Conformance level “A”**  
These items must be satisfied, otherwise, one or more disability groups will find it impossible to access information in the document. This includes supplying alternative text for images,

making correct use of HTML elements and using clear, understandable language on your site.

- **Conformance level “Double-A”**

In addition to the level “A” items, you should satisfy the items from this list. Satisfying these items will remove significant barriers to accessing Web documents. This includes ensuring sufficient colour contrast between elements, making page elements available through a key press as well as by mouse and providing a site map.

- **Conformance level “Triple-A”**

In addition to the “double-A” list, satisfying these items will improve access to Web documents. This includes providing a logical tab order through forms and page elements and producing a consistent design across all pages on the website.

The Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) in the UK has compiled a separate set of guidelines, drawing on both the WAI criteria and their own experience of working with blind and partially-sighted users. The RNIB’s “See It Right” logo identifies sites which have passed their criteria.

### Central Government Response

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 requires all organisations providing online services to ensure that those services are accessible to all. Organisations which do not comply may be deemed to be discriminating against those with disabilities.

In response, Central Government has stated that all local authorities should comply with at least the Double-A conformance levels by 2005.