

**Nomination, ICMA programme Excellence Award.**

**Project: VIDEO OPERATED CITIZEN SERVICE**

It is an honour to nominate **City Manager Ib Østergaard Rasmussen \***),  
ICMA **Membership number 522 853**, Guldborgsund Municipality, Denmark  
to receive **the Community Sustainability Award 2012**.

Guldborgsund municipality is a new and large local authority in Denmark formed from the merger of six smaller city governments and one district government. Although it has only 64,000 citizens, it is geographically the tenth largest local authority in Denmark.

The creation of Guldborgsund took place as part of a general re-organisation of local government in Denmark. Overall 271 authorities were reduced to just 98; there was an initial phase in which mergers could be arranged on a voluntary basis, before the central government dictated them.

**Problem assessment.**

After the merger there was pressure to maintain the same level of service in the old town halls – to 'keep the lights on' for four years. The challenge was to secure sustainability to balance the needs of the local communities. Something had to be done.

## **Implementation.**

Guldborgsund's 'anchor' project has been to deploy video conferencing to enable citizens to access the municipality's central services via unmanned, 'digital booths' in three of these small, local centres. High quality interactive video allows them to interact with back office staff at a place – initially based in the town hall offices. Considerable thought has gone into the design of the facilities, which have high-quality disabled access and require no IT skills to use.

Danish local authorities provide a wide range of services, including being the point of access for many national services such as passports and driving licences. They also provide the local communities with for example elderly care, schools, maternity benefits, pensions, child support, heating allowances, and grants for building works.

The initiative for the video conferencing project came from the city manager being the top civil servant within the municipality. The primary motivation was economic; after the merger, there was a need to deliver efficiency savings rather than to keep the same level of staff in all of the local offices which had been merged into the new entity. The weakness of the Danish economy and the need of local sustainability made this all the more important.

The digital receptions provide access to all of these services. Citizens can also book face to face meetings with municipality employees where this is required – the booking system itself is available at the digital receptions.

The technical work for the project was all carried out by the American Cisco company, with the support of the local Danish company Net Design, an IP Communications reseller. They supplied the hardware, the applications and software, and provided integration.

The project took ten months from inception to completion. The solution was developed jointly by teams which included participation from the administrative services function at Guldborgsund and not to forget, representatives from the local community.

The project has included the creation of a specialist back office video call centre, in one of the old municipal offices. Front office physical reception facilities have been replaced by unstaffed digital reception offices.

### **Lessons learned**

The project is the first of its kind in Europe. The project clarify, that the local government and its city manager, Ib Østergaard Rasmussen are highly innovative and focused on the needs of the community. There were many barriers to overcome in order to make the project successful:

- The employees, and their trade union, resisted more or less the project. The administration essentially ignored these concerns and went ahead with the project; the unions fear was to lose jobs to finance the cost of all the new technology.
- The elected politicians in local government were afraid that the failure of the project would bring the merger and creation of the new municipality into disrepute. In practice, the administration function was able to carry out the project without political authorisation, under its terms of reference which allows it to make the functioning of the city more effective.
- Citizens were concerned that the quality of services would suffer. The response from the city was to take the critics and turn them into allies by active involvement of them to participate first in focus groups, and then on an advisory board. This included both vociferous individual critics and elder representative organisations. The result was that these people became powerful advocates for the system – e.g. on TV.

## **Results and outcome**

The most important objective was the satisfaction of the citizen's requirements. There were specific targets set in terms of numbers of visits to the unmanned, digital receptions, and this measure was closely monitored.

In terms of efficiency savings, the project is expected to deliver staff reductions rising to 210,000 USD in 2011.

In retrospect, the key learning from the project was 'do it anyway'. The success of Guldborgsund's initiative was due to the ability to establish a sense of urgency. Building a coalition between staff and citizens was most important.

**For further information:**

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**The project:** <http://www.vimeo.com/15018086>

Denmark, March 2, 2012  
Sincerely

Mr. Bjarne Pedersen  
President,  
National Association of Chief Executives in Denmark – KOMDIR  
Member of ICMA

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Note: Ib Rasmussen has left his job now and there is currently not a manager in Guldborgsund Municipality.