



Project Case Study

The Sedgemoor Room, Sedgemoor District Council, Bridgwater

| The Challenge...

To improve accessibility and quality of sound in council meeting room

| The Solution...

State-of-the-art congress, PA and induction loop systems from Gordon Morris Ltd

| The Benefits...

Increased use of room and better access for users

Sedgemoor District Council is a local authority serving a predominantly rural population of about 104,000 people. They provide a range of services, including housing, leisure, arts, tourism, finance and marketing services from their headquarters in Bridgwater, Somerset. Recently the council undertook an extensive refurbishment of this building, including a large meeting room, known as The Sedgemoor Room.

Improving Council Facilities

Facilities Manager Jo Taylor manages the council's corporate property portfolio and is responsible for around ninety-five buildings, ranging from a pigsty, a windmill and a lighthouse to the main headquarters. As part of this role, Jo was very closely involved in establishing the brief and specifications for the refurbishment scheme. *"We established the scope, or the brief, defining exactly what we wanted and how we wanted to go about delivering the service here. We were keen to bring the building up to modern standards and also to make sure it was fully compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act."* This meant taking into account the needs of the public and staff who use the building on council-related matters. However, there was an additional reason for refurbishing the Sedgemoor Room in particular: *"One of the reasons for developing the Sedgemoor Room is so that we can actually operate as a facility for external people to use as well."* Installing a high quality PA and induction loop system was therefore seen as a good way of helping to achieve three aims- to deliver better service to the community, to comply with the relevant legislation and to make the room more appealing to external users.

The council had used different companies in the past with mixed outcomes. Jo Taylor was not impressed with the results delivered by the previous system in the Sedgemoor Room. *"The system we had before was not worth the table it was sat on. It was invariably more turned off than it was turned on, so it made sense to locate a company that could do everything we needed to do - not just in this room, but in our other meeting rooms as well."*

Getting it Right

It was this desire to get things right that led the council to appoint Gordon Morris Ltd. *“Do it all properly and do it once- that was our view. If we have to spend the money, let's do it once, spend the money, get it right and then it's fine for the future.”* Gordon Morris Ltd was able to impress because of *“the quality of the work and reputation”* as well as having the advantage of being local to the council buildings.

The challenge was to retrofit a system that offered the high-quality Sedgemoor demands in a room with quite poor acoustic properties. *“The acoustics have never been very good in any of the rooms in this building just because of the nature of the construction. And because we were retrofitting it's always been difficult- so we've found that the combination of the loop system and the PA system has helped significantly. It's always going to be difficult to retrofit into an existing building but I think that the solution that we've got has been brilliant.”* It was also important that Gordon Morris Ltd staff were able to fit professionally within a larger project. *“It was a huge project, so it was one part of a bigger picture.”*

Added Value

The council has discovered the benefits of using specialist expertise for its sound and hearing system. As Jo Taylor explains the performance of the equipment has transformed the way the room is utilised and made meetings much more accessible for all. *“We went from council meetings in the old chamber where you were lucky if you could hear much. Even someone with no hearing impairment found it difficult to hear clearly, just because of the hum of the air conditioning and general chitter-chatter. So the PA system without a doubt is now used at every single council meeting and any meeting of any particular size they use it- it's an automatic thing now.”*

The convenience of a permanently enabled induction loop system integrated with the PA and congress system has also been a significant advantage. *"The hearing loop is never off; it's always left on, whereas the old system they'd turn it off and turn it on and so it worked for some people and not for others. So now what we've got is a room that's enabled all the time, so if you're coming in and you've got a hearing impairment or even you haven't, you don't have to ask because the systems already live and it's already switched on and the PA system is already set out. So what we're doing is actually making it much more equal and accessible for everybody and there's no stigma attached to having to ask for the loop to be turned on because you can't hear."*

One further benefit has been that the council are now able to look at marketing the Sedgemoor Room as a facility for external users. Being able to offer state-of-art sound and congress system has made the premises a much more desirable location for other organisations looking to hold larger meetings. *"We're still in the early days of actually marketing this as a room to hire out, but certainly the use of the room has increased significantly and a lot of people have benefited from the loop and the PA and they certainly appreciate it. It's made a big difference to the way that they hold their meetings and so it's definitely adding value in that respect. And it's without question adding value as far as the public are concerned."*

The system has in fact been so successful that other local authorities have looked to it as a benchmark for what they might achieve in their premises. *"We have had a number of other local authorities come in to have a look at the system. They come for a meeting, they know it's here and they go back to their council offices and then they bring people back, so we've had a few visits. We do recommend Gordon Morris. We have had a number of queries and we have pointed people in your direction. I'm not at all reticent in recommending you."*

Gordon Morris Ltd would like to thank Jo Taylor for her kind cooperation with this article and wishes everyone at Sedgemoor District Council the very best for the future.

To find out more about what they can offer visit: www.sedgemoor.gov.uk/