

## INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

### A new start in an old Parliament

The vision for PIMS was set out in the original project brief presented to House authorities in April 2001.

- The overall goal is to provide ‘Information Management’, to support the business processes of the House at all levels. It will be achieved by developing and maintaining an information infrastructure that is unified, consistent, and seamless.
- It should be easily accessed by, and appropriate to the needs of, all of the various user communities. For users to be able to access its information and services, it should not be necessary for them to understand the internal structures of Parliament. Each user should be able to access the information and services that he or she needs, in a manner that is convenient and logical to them. Where, for example, information is held or used by many parties and it needs to be changed, it should be possible to change it once and once only.
- Users of Parliamentary services would gain access through a common interface or ‘portal’, which will enable them to see and access only those services that are relevant to them.

The vision and the objectives were elaborated in a business case in May 2002, which described a number of options. The strongest economic case was for “a progressive implementation of a major system or systems which – if successful – would give Parliament much of the IS functionality it needed for the foreseeable future”.<sup>1</sup>

A number of concerns were raised at the time about the scope of the project and about including so many complex requirements in a single exercise. The current PIMS project has therefore focused on the immediate priorities for the Libraries of the two Houses, and the replacement of the obsolescent POLIS systems. In addition, it provides replacement functionality for the POLIS applications used by the Table Office and European Scrutiny Committee in the Commons, and the European Union Committee in the Lords.

The PIMS project was nonetheless charged with ensuring that the products selected, and the infrastructure on which they are now being built, were procured and designed with an eye to potential future requirements. For this reason, the applications software is all compliant with recognised industry standards to permit future integration with other standards-based products; and the technical architecture follows a modular, flexible design so that it can be extended as required.

Whereas the House of Commons Library’s POLIS system has stood the Library in good stead over a period of 24 years, it was designed by librarians for librarians, and was never intended to be easy for non-expert users. PIMS, on the other hand, has been designed with the Member of Parliament as customer and user in mind. It will continue to provide Library staff

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from the Director of Finance to the Clerk, 31 July 2002.

with the sophisticated search tools that they need to fulfil their role in providing Members with research and analytical services; but the new system will empower Members by making it easier for them to access the information they need when they need it.

Under the surface, the information has all been categorised, structured and stored so that access appears unified and seamless to the user. The structures have been developed to meet the specific search requirements of Members, based on many years of experience gained by the Library staff of Members' information behaviours. A customer value study carried out by the Library last year recognised that Members' information needs do vary considerably, and that individual Members can have different requirements at different times. Thus, many Members and their staff will wish to be able to search for information for themselves, but there will also be times when they would prefer to discuss an issue with one of the Library's experts.

The Library's 'knowledge base' comprises material such as:

- Parliamentary questions and debates
- Legislation
- Committee reports
- European documents
- Newspaper articles and press notices
- Official publications
- Library research papers and briefings
- Links to relevant external sources of information
- The Library's on-line catalogue of books and periodicals.

PIMS will provide seamless access to this extensive range of information, and create links between individual items. So, for example, if a Member is looking at the text of a Bill, and wishes to read the debate on it, PIMS will enable him to click straight through to it. Another click might take him to the Library's research paper on the topic under discussion. If that fails to provide him with the information he requires, yet another click will put him in touch by email with the author of that paper – or he may prefer to telephone that person. The information resources and the routes to them are all managed within the PIMS content repository, reducing the effort for the busy Member of Parliament who has to navigate them.

PIMS will even allow users to store their personal preferences, so that they can receive notification of new material matching their profiles when it arrives in the PIMS knowledge base.

The PIMS project has been sponsored by the Librarian of the House of Commons, but also has the support of the Clerks of the two Houses of Parliament. The project team is based in the Library, and the director is a long-serving member of staff. Other members of the team include staff recruited for their specialist expertise in project management, business and data analysis, as well as technology; and staff drawn from other areas of Parliament. The emphasis for the project has been on understanding the requirements of the business of Parliament and of Members, so that the project is driven by the business needs, rather than by the constraints of the technology. The project team works closely with their systems integrator partner, Morse plc, who were selected after a rigorous public procurement exercise, on the basis not only of the suitability of the set of software products proposed, but also on their proven experience of working with them.

The main components of PIMS are *Vignette*, which provides document and content management functionality for the Library's knowledge base and manages the relationships between different content types in the repository. *Vignette* will also provide the portal to PIMS. Examples of other organisations using *Vignette* include the web site for the recent Athens Olympics, and the Sony music corporation.

*Autonomy* is widely recognised as the market leader in search and categorisation technologies. It will enable the Library to automate much of the subject indexing currently done manually, thus freeing resources to work on other services for customers; as well as providing a powerful and fast search engine.

Finally the system will use Microsoft's SQL Server reporting tool to build many 'reports' of pre-packaged information drawn from the repository. The reports range from a *Bill Index* which will allow users to track the progress of legislation at a glance, to *Who Does What in the Library*, an easy-to-use guide to the Library's many subject experts.

It had been hoped that PIMS would go live by the end of 2004. Unexpected delays in data migration from the old POLIS systems have meant that only some of the applications will be available at the end of the year, and most users will not now see the full benefits of the system until Easter. In the meantime, however, the House authorities are already planning for a second phase of PIMS, in conjunction with projects to improve Parliament's intranet and internet sites; and to introduce document and records management more widely.