An Art Deco-style listed building in Wales presented both an exciting and challenging opportunity when it came to bringing its conferencing system into the 21st Century. Charlotte Ashley explores.

Going digital

Home to the governing body for the city of Newport, located on the border of England and Wales, Newport Civic Centre was long overdue an upgrade to its conferencing and interpretation system when it contacted local installer Simon Hurditch five years ago. The actual installation of its new system – the first of its kind in the UK – would not be completed until 2018, however.

The council's brief to the installer was modernising its conference environment with a system that could work at the switch of the button and that was both affordable and reliable. "When I first got involved with the Newport City Council they didn't have the money to do anything with the chamber so it got put on the back burner and nothing happened for years," recalls Hurditch, technical director at Simcol Communications. "Within that time I'd been introduced to new products and companies including Media Vision who approached me

to see if I had any projects in the works." A partnership was then struck, with the £37,000 (€42,000) project at Newport sealed following the manufacturer's offer for the council's 50 members to trial the equipment for a couple of weeks before making a decision.

"The old system was so complicated and unreliable that if anyone went in one of the racks (with four graphic equalisers) and turned the wrong control or pressed the wrong button the sound would shut off," states Hurditch. The integrator had previously offered both wired and infrared options as an upgrade to its dated 25-year-old hard-wired system to the council's decision makers, but a digital infrared system

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> *- Simon Hurditch, Simcol*

was preferred. Hurditch notes this was driven by the ease of use for councillors, lack of RF interference and ensuring the privacy of non-broadcasted sessions. The chamber's location within the 1940-built, Art Deco building (with Grade II Listed building status) meant an upgrade to the microphone and interpretation system would require extensive planning around its furniture to ensure cables weren't visible. "There may be some installs which you look back on as fairly easy, but this was not one of those projects," says Hurditch. "It took us about three or four days for the two of us to do, which you'd not really expect for a wireless system."

A Taiden infrared wireless system comprising >

< 35 digital infrared wireless microphones, six IR transceivers and two interpreter consoles was installed during a week pre-arranged with the council for the installation. The system also equips the council for simultaneous interpretation into Welsh wherever members may be sat in the chamber (via an infrared pocket unit and headphones). "Certain equipment like the infrared radiators has to be wired and trying to get cables around the place without making a mess or taking bits of woodwork apart was really difficult," says Hurditch. "Probably the most challenging part of the project overall was working to get cables around the room's huge wooden doors inside the door frame without removing any panelling."

The system works with a broader Public-i council meeting webcasting system connected to three data projectors and three large displays presenting important information to the councillors, and a number of PTZ cameras. Hurditch adds that the chamber is now easily equipped for upgrades later down the line should the council desire; "In the future, if they want to do any control from the Taiden system itself, this functionality is built in (i.e. dragging up the cameras) or if they want to add the capacity for voting, we've allowed for this too." Feedback problems with the old system brought about by the acoustically challenging environment have >