

Flexible friend

Amanda Nicholls speaks to FSI's Adrian Jarvis about how CAFM systems are helping respond to FM taking the centre stage in PFI

Over the last five years, the focus on PFI bids is moving towards output rather than input specifications with facilities management attracting more attention. To win over authorities, PFI companies must display a strong reputation of long-term maintenance rather than simply wowing with design and construction.

As a result, FM experience and systems are becoming more sophisticated leading to a growing number of projects using Computer Aided Facilities Management (CAFM) programs.

Facilities managers who were previously reliant on manual asset management have embraced CAFM software. The programs can help with bid decision making for the local authority through to reporting tools for private sector defects.

FSI (FM Solutions) is one of the companies that supply CAFM systems to both public and private sectors. Formed in 1990 it was one of the first companies to market a Windows-based maintenance package and has since been developing IT products to meet the growing CAFM requirements in PFI projects. Evolution of CAFM has meant that information previously restricted to the 'back office' and 'technical managers' can now be used to provide desk-top access and information to end-users. This ranges from room booking and fault reporting through to travel enquires and ordering of services such as deliveries to the work stations.

Business development manager Adrian Jarvis has been with FSI for over six years and has seen the company live through a management buy-out by the operational directors in 2002. It has since grown in

strength with employees rising from 20 to 60. He says the restructure has helped FSI become, "more structured with financially astute processes designed to help the day-to-day running of the business."

PFI is still a growing concern - currently it constitutes about 5% of the business in terms of projects and 10% of the overall turnover. Its first PFI was back in December 1999 so they have been developing tools since the very early days of the scheme. There are 28 operational projects using FSI's CAFM system Concept including the first major PFI hospital contracts at Dartford & Gravesham NHS Trust and Hairmyres Hospital in Scotland.

"In the early days of PFI it was a fast evolving process and CAFM solutions needed to reflect the exacting criteria imposed by performance, cost and profit driven business models," says Jarvis. "At that time I worked closely with a number of bid teams, and in many cases provided them with a lot of input in terms of CAFM capability, knowledge and support, whilst quickly getting to grips with the demands of the PFI bid process. A number of clients now select Concept as their preferred CAFM system."

FSI currently operates in four PFI sectors - education, healthcare, defence and central government. Its largest project to date was the hugely successful MoD Main Building where it had continued presence on the project site helping the service provider with management of the initial refurbishment and staff transfer phases and now full service delivery.

Jarvis says the strengths of the Concept system for PFI projects is its flexibility and

transparency. He said: "We are very open in terms of the reporting architecture and the system allows controlled access to the system data making it very transparent with clients and service partners."

"The underlying database allows a whole host of reporting tools and we also have the flexibility to map and change processes. Every organisation has different reporting needs and that's one of our biggest challenges - matching the products to the complexity of the performance and payment mechanisms."

FUTURE PROOF

High bid costs and the risks associated with losing a bid at the later stages have been a long-standing criticism of the PFI process. Attention predominantly focuses on the PFI companies but this risk also affects the many parties involved outside the central bid team.

Jarvis says that although FSI is not an equity partner in the consortium, there is a commercial risk attached to investing time with a team who may not be successful. "Regardless of the outcome of any bid, we've taken the view that in the long term, we're investing in valuable client relationships. Obviously our goal is to win the bid with our clients, but that's all part of the commercial risk of working on PFI contracts. In some measure this was a hard sell internally," he said. "The cost and time-scales for bidding are horrendous but the more people we can work with can lessen that risk. And if we can work with two of the three on a shortlist then we can sometimes end up in a win-win situation."

There are several CAFM providers operating in the PFI



Adrian Jarvis
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market but Jarvis believes FSI is unique in its focus on both hard and soft services in one system. The majority of CAFM systems are built around hard service provision such as the management of assets and traditional planned maintenance. But Jarvis says, "we have a broad suite of tools depending on delivery requirements and have responded to challenges in the PFI market by advancing our product line. One major challenge is the complexity of the performance and payment mechanisms and providing an appropriate solution that fits all."

PFI may present unique challenges to CAFM providers, but how are FSI planning on responding the fast-paced changes in the market?

"Our challenge is to ensure that our offering continues to meet the requirements of the market," says Jarvis. "We have to make sure we are future proof and are providing future proofing for our clients. It's our fifteenth anniversary this year and yet we are looking to work with PFI companies for 25 years. The unique challenge that PFI throws down to CAFM professionals is to not only be in tune with the market, but anticipate its requirements."