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power to you



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Aberdeen has more than 200,000 residents, making it Scotland’s third largest city. Aberdeen City Council is responsible for providing a wide range of services for the city’s inhabitants, including education, housing, and social care and transport. The Council manages around 23,000 homes and public buildings, and repairs are handled by its Housing and Environment Service.

The Council was previously using a paper-based system to manage repair tasks, with its craftsmen picking up their list of jobs at the start of each day from the depot. It identified that by moving to a mobile working solution, it could improve efficiency, save money, and provide a better service for its tenants.

“We set up a temporary scheduling system to see what problems there were,” says Allen Small, Project and Systems Manager at Aberdeen City Council. “We found that the key was to have both a scheduling system and a mobile working solution functioning together, to enable us to get the best results.”

Vodafone was already providing voice and data services to the council and it was a natural choice to deliver the mobility solution, which is based on Consilium’s Total Mobile mobile computing platform. “We preferred to have one provider for both airtime and hardware - Vodafone,” says Allen. “By minimising the number of suppliers, it is easier to get good results or to solve problems.”

Initially, Aberdeen trialled standard consumer handsets, but found that they were not suitably reliable. “We talked to Vodafone about providing us with a ruggedised device, and we chose the Motorola MC-55 for our repair staff,” says Allen. “We are also trialling the Motorola ES400, which is a smaller device, for people that don’t require the toughness of the MC-55.

“We went for a ‘belt and braces’ approach,” explains Allen. “We identified the handsets we wanted, then Vodafone provides a managed service including supplying a fully-configured device.”

Under a three-year warranty, Vodafone collects any faulty handsets and replaces them with new ones. It has also been fast to solve any teething troubles as the system was rolled out, as Allen comments: “We had an initial issue where cells weren’t capturing data and I called Vodafone who took responsibility and solved the problem - they were very responsive.”



Flexible working

With the new system, the workers are issued their jobs one by one via their mobile device. They are empowered to take as long as is required to complete a job, which means the council has been able to increase the 'first fix' percentage of tasks finished in one visit from 62% to 86%.

"Flexibility is important – it takes the pressure off the workers to get through a fixed number of jobs," says Allen. Staff also have more authority to decide what actions are needed, for example to replace a door frame if the initial request was simply for a new lock.

If a worker goes to a job and finds they need a non-standard item that they don't have with them, they call the depot to request it. They can then go on to their next repair, and a separate van will deliver the required part and call the worker to let them know when they can go back to finish off the first task. This means that skilled trades people don't spend their time driving back and forth collecting parts, and can maximise the time they spend on repairs.

With the Motorola devices, workers record their hours and any additional materials required, enabling costs to be automatically allocated to the correct budget. The handsets provide key information to help staff complete each job, and GPS time and geolocation data from the devices helps the council to record its team's activity.

Improved productivity

Due to the new system, productivity has improved dramatically, with workers able to complete more jobs. Over the last 12 months, the average number of jobs finished per week has risen by 46% due to the mobile working solution, new stock management processes and the scheduling software used by the council.

“The workers like the devices as they can work from home and don’t have to come into the depot to pick up job tickets,” says Allen. “We schedule their last job near where they live, so they get home quicker, and we’ve brought in a new craft worker agreement that gives people more flexibility in their working hours.” Reduced travel has saved time for the workers, while cutting the council’s costs and contributing to lowering its carbon emissions.

Customer service has improved dramatically, with the average time to complete a routine repair almost halving from 10.8 to 5.7 days. The percentage of repair appointments that are not kept has gone down from 22% to only 3%, while the proportion of tenants saying they are satisfied with repairs has gone up from 86% to 95%.

“We can take phone calls to book an appointment up to 6.30pm and be at the tenant’s home at 8am the next morning if that’s what they want – improving the service to our residents,” says Allen.

From the Council’s point of view, it has seen 98% of emergency visits completed in one day, compared to a previous figure of 94%. Now, 98% of all repairs are finished on time, a substantial improvement on the performance of 86% before the mobile working solution was implemented.

Cost and efficiency savings

“Overall, the Council has achieved cost savings of more than £1.5 million per year due to the re-design of its repair service to include more flexible working hours, improved scheduling and mobile working,” says Allen.

“As we’ve improved our efficiency, we haven’t got rid of any people, but have been able to take on more work,” explains Allen. “For example, we used to buy in double glazing units, but have now trained our people to make the units in-house, which means we can complete jobs more quickly as the manufacturing processes are in our own hands.”

The benefits achieved due to mobile working were recognised when the Council won the Association for Public Service Excellence’s award for ‘best service team: construction and building’.

So far, the mobile solution has been rolled out to 150 staff working on repairs in the field, with another 150 planned to be added before the end of 2011. Allen’s team is also talking to other functional groups within the council about implementing mobile working more widely, such as environmental services dog wardens and others.

The Council is also starting to win contracts to manage repair services for external organisations – in part due to the results demonstrated from mobile working – which is particularly valuable in a time of financial austerity.

Significant benefits

- Cost savings of more than £1.5 million per year
- Increased productivity, with 46% more jobs per worker completed each week
- Improved customer service, with satisfaction rising from 86% to 95%
- Staff morale increased due to flexible working and the ability to manage their own schedule
- Carbon emissions decreased due to reduction in travel

