

TRANSPUTEC IMPLEMENTS A MOBILE HOUSING REPAIRS SYSTEM FOR HARLOW DC



THE CLIENT

Harlow is a thriving new town situated in southwest Essex near to the M11 London-Cambridge motorway and the M25 London Orbital motorway. It is on the London-Cambridge main railway line and is close to London's Stansted Airport. Harlow is still growing; its current population is 76,500 - expected to increase to 84,000 with the development of Church Langley. Harlow town centre serves a wide area of west Essex and Hertfordshire.

THE BRIEF

In 1999, the Audit Commission published a critical report on Harlow District Council (HDC) concluding that "it has not been serving local people well. They have paid too much for poor services, which have been getting worse". There was a lack of customer focus.

The Audit Commission went further in identifying housing repairs as a major part of the problem. Apart from being the most expensive of any of its group of equivalent authorities in 2000, and almost 30 per cent more expensive than the national average, customers and members' satisfaction with the service were at a very low level. The senior management at HDC realised that something needed to be done. Steve Hampson, HDC's executive director, housing said: "We understood at an early stage that any change would need to be fundamental if it was going to have any effect. However, initially, we needed to fully understand the nature of the problem." HDC is responsible for 10,400 homes, which generate an average of 50,000 tenant-reported repair requests annually.

OVERVIEW

The need

The lack of customer focus outlined by the Audit Commission in 1999, made HDC realize that something fundamental had to change. 50,000 tenant repair requests have to be dealt with efficiently and correctly annually.

The solution

Transputec chose to work with Staffware to deliver a process engine driven workflow solution with the use of PDA hand helds for efficiency in the field.

The housing repair service was run from seven neighbourhood offices along the traditional contractor DLO lines. Tenants made requests for repairs to the relevant neighbourhood office, which then attempted to diagnose the fault, using 4,500 separate schedule of rate categories. Often, the diagnosis was incorrect resulting in wasted visits by inappropriate tradesmen. This then required a separate surveyor visit to obtain the right diagnosis before a correct tradesman was dispatched.

Appointments could not be scheduled at the time of reporting. The tenant's availability or convenience was never taken into consideration. Unsurprisingly, half the visits made by staff took place at times when tenants were out. This was particularly frustrating to tenants who sometimes had to wait many weeks for the repair to be made – the average was 45 days, over six weeks! Steve Hampson continued: "We responded to this frustration in 1999 by deciding to re-engineer the service, in consultation with the tenants and the staff. The brief was to turn the housing repairs service into one of the best in the country." To do this required not only a change in the system, but a change in attitude and the way the whole council worked. HDC retained the services of Think First, an external consultancy, to help evaluate and re-model the repairs service. HDC subsequently partnered with Transputec, a Wembley-based IT solutions provider, to develop a bespoke IT solution for the housing repair service. Julian Prout, project director for Transputec, said: "Harlow Council and Transputec formed a partnership, sharing the business risk, which enabled us to jointly develop the advanced information management system required for the application."

THE SOLUTION

Transputec chose to work with Staffware, a global leader in business process management software. The Staffware process engine was utilised to form the backbone of the whole housing repair system, orchestrating all the work processes and transactions. "The process engine removed much of the time-consuming administration and decision making processes from the operators," said Nick Sims, strategic business manager for Staffware. "The automation and management of this complex, decision-intensive business process dramatically improved efficiency."

The benefits

- More efficient allocation of staff resources.
- Better stock control.
- Better performance and management information.
- Gets the right person to the right place at the right time.
- 96% of appointments were kept compared to 56% before.
- Average time to complete non urgent repairs was reduced from 45 days to a staggering 13.5 days.

Operating on the familiar Microsoft Windows environment, the new system has fundamental and significant benefits over the old. A key advantage is when tenants are reporting a fault, the operator can diagnose the problem, order the repair and book the appointment with both the tenant and the tradesperson at the time of the initial phone call.

This is a step-change in customer service, giving tenants for the first time immediate, mutually convenient, appointments, and an undertaking when the work will be done. The system does away with the 4,500 fault items and replaces them with new PC-based diagnostic job interrogation software. Through a series of layered questions, an operator can assess the work needed, and the software then triggers the work process. To ensure that this efficiency carries on through to the tradespeople, all were issued with a robust hand-held personal organiser (PDA) for real time working. As faults are reported and appointments logged, the job ticket is delivered automatically to the right tradesperson. He/she can see that job arriving in their personal workflow queue.

THE BENEFITS

Harlow council issued a report outlining the benefits of the complaints software, which includes the following: The system enables the more efficient allocation of staff resources, better management of stock through an integrated inventory control system, and better performance and management information – HDC management can monitor and evaluate its performance. “The key to delivering an effective service is getting the right person to the right place at the right time with the right information,” said Steve Hampson. “The new system in housing repairs does that very effectively.” The results following implementation have been astonishing. The average time to complete non-urgent repairs was reduced from 45 to just 13.5 days. 96 per cent of appointments made were kept, compared to 56 per cent before – these two results alone contributed to customer satisfaction increasing to 98 per cent! It would have been reasonable to think that such an improvement in service would cost money. Not so – the average cost of housing repairs has been reduced by 19%,

Customer feedback

“New Transputec/Staffware solution helped Harlow District Council reduce housing repair times by nearly 60 per cent, increase tenant satisfaction to 98 per cent and at the same time reduce costs by nearly 20 per cent.”

“The payback in terms of tenant and member satisfaction was probably worth the investment many times over”

Steve Hampson, Executive Director, Harlow District Council

resulting in the overall repairs and maintenance budget being reduced by £2.1 million in the year 2001-02.

The total cost of the consultancy was £350,000, with hand held terminals costing an additional £60,000. The payback on HDC's investment was well short of a year. Steve Hampson concluded: "The new system has been a revolution. This state-of-the-art technology has moved HDC from having an inefficient, highly-criticised, paper-driven service, to an e-government compliant, appreciated customer focused one. "We have the best of all worlds: we have significantly improved service and at the same time reduced costs. This is certainly a demonstration of value for money. This achievement was recognised in 2003, when the Council was "Highly commended" at the LGC national awards ceremony.

THE PEDIGREE

Since our inception in the mid-1980s, Transputec has had the trust of Britain's foremost IT users, including the Ministry of Justice, Samsung, Danone, Camelot, Chubb Insurance and DP-DHL/ Williams Lea to name but a few. Vertical sector experience covering banking & finance, media, third sector, technology, retail, SMEs and health care adds further value to IT users in the form of industry-specific knowledge.

The human component

The pace of change in ICT is so fast that what was cutting edge technology just a few years ago we now need to refer to as *traditional IT* in order to differentiate it from what we're doing today and tomorrow.

A business like Transputec is as much about its people - their experience, customer-focus and expertise - as anything else. From initial assessment to delivery of turnkey solutions and day-to-day customer care, these professionals take solutions from Transputec's hardware, software and professional services business units and ensure they're a perfect fit.

Throughout our supply chain we have exceptional relationships with the world's premier hardware and software brands, giving us a competitive edge to make everything from economies of scale to mission-critical architecture judgment calls.

TRANSPUTEC

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