Innovation wins major IT industry accolade

2010 UK IT INDUSTRY
AWARDS
computing
WINNER
Newport City Homes
Winner, Small IT Department of the Year 2010

Solution

- Uniclass Social Housing
- Mobile Working
- Workforce Scheduling
- Customer Response Management

Services

- Project Management
- Implementation
- Systems Integration
- User Training
- Support

Business Benefits

- Increased Repairs Productivity
- Intergrated Mobile Working
- Comprehensive Management Reporting

Successful housing associations are committed to providing excellent services to their residents, but maintaining high standards demands the right information technology for planning, service provision and management reporting. Thanks to the assistance of ROCC, Newport City Homes (NCH) has increased repairs productivity, improved management reporting and introduced mobile working.

Established in 2009, NCH manages the housing stock previously owned by Newport City Council. It manages circa 10,000 properties including rented homes, leasehold flats, garages, commercial premises and shared ownership properties and employs 352 staff.

According to Neil Jones, Head of Information Services for Newport City Homes, a new set of IT solutions were required for the newly-formed organisation.

"We had an open mind and went to the market. We wanted to make sure what we gave the new organisation was the most modern and up-to-date," said Jones.

A new central office, telephone system, servers and networks would be matched by a new housing repairs system along with mobile working, asset management and workforce scheduling. The housing repairs system had to support the latest Microsoft technology, be web-enabled and use a Microsoft SQL database.

"We wanted our housing repairs system to interface with OpenAccounts. An interface was also needed to an existing Anite housing management system along with links to the new asset management system."

Project Summary

Newport City Homes took over Newport City Council's housing and commercial property stock in March 2009.

It built a complete new IT infrastructure including the implementation of new housing repairs software alongside mobile working, workforce scheduling and asset management.

As the prime contractor, ROCC provided a full set of professional services from project management to post-implementation support.

The primary objective was to increase efficiency, essential for a five-year programme of housing investment. The housing repairs system had to capture data easily and automate document production. Several options were evaluated but adds Jones, "the users liked the look and feel of Uniclass Social Housing better."

Although an intuitive interface with tabbed navigation was attractive, it was not the only advantage of upgrading to this fully-integrated system.

"There was also an existing relationship with ROCC and recognition that ROCC were a responsive company to work with. They were very helpful and prepared to go the extra mile."

Prime contractors
NCH appointed ROCC as prime contractors covering social housing repairs, asset management, workforce scheduling and mobile working. ROCC's services included design, development, implementation, training and support within a Prince2 project management framework - independently monitored by a Tribal Group consultant.

The project started in August 2009 with a 'big bang' implementation scheduled for February 2010. ROCC's consultants worked closely with Jones's IT team including his housing repairs system administrator, Glynis Davies. ROCC's reliability, integration skills and experience of the social housing sector were decisive in delivering the project on time and within budget.

Neil Jones

Head of Information Services, Newport City Homes

"We wanted to be as innovative as we possibly could. The users liked the look and feel of Uniclass Social Housing better. ROCC were very helpful and prepared to go the extra mile."

"The whole experience from implementation through to ongoing utilization has been very positive; the system has key beneficial features and in-built flexibility with ROCC ensuring that all interfaces work together effectively and seamlessly" said Glynis Davies.

"What was required was a pragmatic approach and that's what ROCC provided us with. I was very pleased with the way the implementation went," said Jones. "The ROCC consultants were very professional, flexible and helpful."

Uniclass Social Housing provides everything from contractor management and service delivery to reporting including the Welsh Assembly Government's KPIs for the Welsh Housing Quality Standard.

"The reporting and ability to manage our staff are real benefits we have experienced," said Jones. "We can see that we're hitting our KPIs and that repairs are undertaken in accordance with the tenant service levels."

Chris Potter

Director of Uniclass Operations, ROCC

"ROCC have always been proud of being in-tune with our customers' requirements, delivering innovative cost-effective solutions. We worked very closely with NCH to ensure that all their requirements were delivered"

The close links between housing repairs, housing management and finance applications has greatly improved information flow. But the best operational improvements come from integrating mobile working with Uniclass Social Housing.

All tradesmen are equipped with a mobile phone-PDA for job details and completion confirmations. Coupled with a new text messaging reminder service for tenants, there's been a 40 percent reduction in missed appointments.

"We actually get more repairs work done because the tradesmen don't have to come into the office to pick up job sheets every morning," said Jones.

When the Connaught Group went into administration in September 2010, NCH employed the gas fitters that were due to be made redundant. ROCC also stepped in to help. "Within a very short turnaround, ROCC were able to implement the gas servicing functionality already in Uniclass Social Housing."

The increased operational efficiency along with improved reporting means better service delivery to the residents. Proactive planning based on sound management information holds down operational costs with Uniclass Social Housing offering a unified view of all programmed, cyclical and responsive work.

"We realise that it's given us the building blocks and we need to go further. ROCC are part of our strategic way forward," said Jones.

NCH is forging ahead with IT, winning BCS The Chartered Institute for IT's UK IT industry awards 2010 for the Small IT Department of the Year category. In November 2010, ROCC implemented customer response management software to help improve service levels further. Looking after the tenants never comes better than this.

About Newport City Homes

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