

case study



Darlington reduces operatives via OPTI-TIME

MOBILE working will be the future for Darlington Council after the authority's maintenance section returned a 10 percent reduction in operatives during their first month of installing the new system.



Key Points

- 5551 properties from Council owned and Housing Association stock
- Traditional stock base in good condition
- Decent Homes Standard already implemented
- Major works spend £10 million
- Cyclical maintenance spend £0.5 million
- Responsive repairs spend £2.2 million
- 4 star housing authority

Xmbrace Limited

C P House, Otterspool Way
Watford, WD25 8HP
Phone 020 7953 5043,
Fax 01923 650344

For general information -
info@xmbrace.com

For sales information -
www.xmbrace.com

Building Services chose to implement mobile working after a shock audit report in 2004 undertaken by Price Waterhouse Coopers awarded them just one star for housing repairs and maintenance.

Said *Malcolm Harding, Head of Building Services*: "Price Waterhouse identified three key weaknesses including: a lack of customer focus, an ineffective appointments system and issues with the schedule of rates."



"The audit highlighted the fact we didn't really integrate our services or measure what we achieved. We gave our tenants what we thought they needed, rather than asking them what they actually wanted."

New Aspirations and Systems

Darlington at the time employed a costly and ineffective paper-based appointments system compounded by an operative bonus system that actively mitigated against value for money.

From this poor inspection, the authority set a series of new aspirations, the most radical of

which was to introduce mobile working to drive the service towards an operations system that would deliver three stars by the next review.

To meet this challenge, Darlington Council contracted Xmbrace to assist with the delivery of a new appointments system.

Said Mr Harding: "We considered a number of companies to help us bring in mobile working as we wanted a system that was adaptable enough to help us achieve our future plans. We chose Xmbrace's OPTI-TIME as we could clearly see it offered a system that could continuously evolve in line with our aspirations for the future."

Mobile Challenges

Mobile working presented a series of challenges for the authority, including restructuring their schedule of rates and multi-skilling the workforce. The most difficult challenge, however, involved changing the way operatives worked and extending their working hours to give customers greater choice, at the same time as removing the bonus system.

Said Mr Harding: "In many ways the people element of mobile working was the most difficult



case study



part of the project to achieve and took 12 months, being finally implemented on November 1, 2006.”

Through a series of consultations offering operatives new terms and conditions of work, mobile working was introduced alongside the new appointments system, an extended working day and specialist training for operatives.

The project led to a much closer relationship with Darlington College, who worked in tandem with the authority to provide bespoke multi-skilling courses, such as plastering for non-plasterers and bricklaying for non-bricklayers.

Rate Simplification

The schedule of rates was also simplified from 6,000 items to just 400, all linked to centralised software systems and a call centre diagnostic tool to help front line non-technical staff establish the necessary response for each caller.

Said Mr Harding: “In its first fully operational month, the new system has helped us deliver staggering results. During the first four weeks we managed 1,966 appointments and immediately achieved a reduction in operatives.

“But most remarkably, we achieved workforce acceptance of the new system, including using

PDA’s, and our customers are fully behind the new system as they have been consulted and involved throughout the process through the Tennant Groups.”

“We can now shape our rota around demand rather than offering a blank



service and have reduced operatives by 10 percent, we are down by 30 licences and our appointments system has improved efficiency.”

“We believe OPTI-TIME will become a key component in achieving our aspiration of delivering not just a Decent Homes Standard for customers, but a Darlington Standard.”



Xmbrace Limited

C P House, Otterspool Way Watford, WD25 8HP

Phone 020 7953 5043, Fax 01923 650344

For general information - info@xmbrace.com

For sales information - sales@xmbrace.com