

case study



Peterborough revolutionise responsive repairs with OPTI-TIME

Peterborough City Services are enjoying a £1.8million efficiency saving after implementing mobile working with Xmbrace OPTI-TIME and scrapping the schedule of rates for their workforce.



Key Points

- Number of properties maintained - 11,900
- Responsive repairs spend - 2.7 million
- Number of responsive orders a year - 29,000
- % appointed / kept - 97%

In the 22 months since implementation, PCS, who deliver the contracting arm of Peterborough City Council Housing, have reduced their staff by 1/3 while increasing customer satisfaction and meeting appointment targets using the Xmbrace scheduling software.



The project has been so successful that PCS finally ceased to use sub contractors three months ago alongside implementing Investors in People for operatives to monitor and review performance.

The contract service company has now acquired gas services work with two neighbouring RSL's, increasing the properties they maintain by a further 2,000.

Said Peter Gray, Assistant Head of Peterborough City Services: "Our previous appointments system was chaotic, with over 60,000 job tickets printed in triplicate, 6,500 options for our schedule of rates and a man management system that left us foraging under van seats to reorganise job cards every time someone went off sick."

"The bonus system for operatives meant jobs were picked according to how much money

could be made and there was little genuine quality control."

"In 2002, inspectors gave us only a one-star rating with poor prospects for improvement. I decided on a complete rethink. After meeting with other housing repair departments in the Direct Works Forum, personal digital assistant devices were recommended and Xmbrace stepped up to the challenge of helping us work flexibly and efficiently."

Rates Strategy

From the outset, Peterborough felt it was important to do away with their schedule of rates and incentivisation, simplifying the process to instead concentrate on time slot work principles. Each job is given roughly 30 - 45 minutes to complete and operatives were moved from bonuses to salaries.



"OPTI-TIME and mobile working go hand in hand and I, for one, couldn't imagine how you would operate one system without the other."

Peter Gray

Assistant Head of Peterborough City Services

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Said Peter: "If we can control time we can control work flow so that an engineer won't arrive at a property thinking he has to get off to the next job, or stay longer than needed at a job to earn more money as was the case through the old bonus system."

"To support this we configured OPTI-TIME to only send the operative one job at a time - this is the beauty of the software as it can be configured any way the client specifies!"

Peterborough also used the system to simplify the call centre operative's role. Traditionally this is a stressful job with a high level of turnover, but PCS felt the most important aspect of the role was to get the right tradesman to the job and OPTI-TIME has helped call centre staff identify and improve this service.

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"Our repairs staff now receive work assignments and report in using PDAs. There have been big increases in efficiency with customer satisfaction levels close to 100 percent. Non-urgent repairs are completed on average within seven days, and work schedulers can locate the nearest appropriate person."

"We can also see what staff are doing. For example, if someone reports that a tenant is out, an e-mail goes straight to our client, who will phone the tenant to check. Jobs put down as "out" have fallen and we are achieving 99 percent appointments."

Mobile working and OPTI-TIME allows Peter an instant view of what is happening with his workforce of 40 operatives in real time, so he and other senior staff can manage workloads simply and quickly.

For example, if gas repairs appointments are not available for a further two weeks, Peter can ask for Saturday diaries to be opened up to accommodate the workflow. If someone is off sick, their jobs can be easily and quickly spread across operatives with capacity for the day.

Said Peter: "OPTI-TIME offers us a window on our operatives with a real time interface that tells me second by second what is happening. So, for example, if I can see through the appointments software that an engineer is struggling to keep all his appointments for a given day, I can redeploy another operative to cover his work, ensuring that all our appointments are ultimately met."

OPTI-TIME also provides performance data that, alongside IIP, allows managers to monitor staff with three monthly performance reviews and improve appointments through flexible working contracts.

As with all large scale change processes, mobile working has taken time to implement, but Peter firmly believes PCS is now at the fine tuning stage and is reaping the rewards of the new system.

"As with all system changes, the most important issue in managing resources still comes down to the culture of an organisation," he said, "but with OPTI-TIME behind me I have access to the information I need to influence change."

"For us, being efficient has meant removing job build, defining what will be done as a repair, managing time and scheduling resources, giving call loggers better front end information and training operatives and back up staff to make a difference."

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