

case study

Utilising project planner for voids to reduce average re-let times by 5 days

Magna Housing Association, which provides and manages over 6,000 quality affordable homes, was established in 1993 when West Dorset District Council transferred its housing stock.



“Project Planner helps us plan where the operatives go and where the availability is; we would have struggled without it. It helps free up a lot of time and we give quite a lot of operative time back to responsive repairs. It’s been great – a definite bonus.”

Claire Boston, Planner
Magna Housing
Association

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It works primarily in Dorset, Devon, South Gloucestershire and Somerset and is committed to providing affordable housing in areas where it is needed most.

Employing around 200 staff across its area of operations, this not for profit organisation also provides housing-related services to people living in the local community and works in partnership with them on the development, efficiency and effectiveness of their housing and services.



Magna Housing Association has been using the OPTI-TIME appointment booking and resource scheduling system by Xmbrace for their responsive repairs work for the past several years. The solution has delivered significant business benefits and Magna wanted to expand it into its voids work.

Voids are complex and require multiple trades working in a certain sequence. Project Planner from Xmbrace is an integral part of OPTI-TIME that enables planned maintenance to be visualised on-screen showing all the different elements of the

work required, the correct sequence of jobs and the gaps between them. It assists the management of void work by taking all of the data entered during the day and publishing the required work onto the operatives’ diaries. As things are constantly changing, it allows the planner to manually manipulate the schedule of work as and when necessary.

The operatives working for Magna Housing Association cover a wide geographical area. This poses a challenge for them being able to handle emergency responsive repair issues. To try to resolve this dilemma Magna Housing Association created a joint planning team where responsive and voids planners work together to cross utilize the operatives.

For instance, if a plumber is working on a voids project and an emergency plumbing issue arises down the road, the plumber working on the void can be switched to the emergency instead of making the customer wait for another plumber who may be far away. Magna Housing Association knew that this novel way of working, in conjunction with Project Planner would save time and increase productivity and efficiency.



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Magna Housing Association currently has three planners: one works with the electricians and masons, the other focuses on carpenters and plumbers and the third does all the planning and void work. All three plan their work separately into the emerging day with the trades being put into main streams. When an emergency arises the planners shift the schedules to accommodate them.

Certain tradesmen have specific days of the week where they are scheduled to work on voids. Claire Boston, Planner, responsible for all planning of voids work, uses Project Planner to plan and allocate these resources to required void work. "Circumstances always change when you are doing voids work," said Claire. "For instance, a housing



officer may look at a home when it is occupied and make a list of the jobs that need to be carried out, however when the residents leave and the house is empty other issues come to light and that changes the whole sequence of jobs for that particular home."

Although they often have two to three weeks notice for planning a voids job, there are other times when they are given the keys to a home and asked how quickly they can turn the work around. Using Project Planner, Claire is able to instantly see where there is availability and can provide an accurate completion date.

Magna Housing Association implemented Project Planner in December 2009 and went live in just three months.

"Yet another more than satisfactory implementation by Xmbrace said David Block, Head of IT for Magna Housing Group, increasing the considerable benefits of using the OPTI-TIME product."

Before the joint planning team was created and Claire Boston became a Voids Planner, she worked in the call centre taking calls and booking jobs with OPTI-TIME. This gave her a head start when she switched to her new role and ensured that in only a few weeks she was able to learn and test the new Project Planner system and make sure she was confident with it. "I was given great support from the Xmbrace team who were on hand to answer the questions I had and help me tweak the system to operate exactly how we wanted it to. Everything went smoothly and we didn't have any major hiccups."

Statistics from the re-housing department in Magna Housing Association show that since the implementation of Project Planner the average time taken in having a home ready to be re-let has reduced by 5 days.

Project Planner has also helped to make better use of the resources available. Claire utilises the calendar to plan in the void work that needs to get done. Any availability in the diary can be instantly seen and she is able to free up resources and have them ready to do responsive work.

Claire Boston said "Project Planner helps us plan where the operatives go and where the availability is and seeing it all visually on a screen is certainly a good thing; we would have struggled without it." Claire continues "It is really working for us. It helps free up a lot of time and we give quite a lot of operative time back to responsive repairs. It's been great – a definite bonus."



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