

case study

Stevenage Homes achieves 2-stars and promising prospects for improvement rating with help from 1st Touch mobile technology

The challenge

Stevenage Homes is the Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) responsible for managing a social housing stock of around 8,300 properties and further leasehold properties for Stevenage Borough Council. Part of Stevenage Homes' responsibility is to carry out day-to-day repairs on the properties, with its own internal workforce carrying out about 30,000 jobs a year.

Until recently the provision of details of jobs and their completion was a paper-based system, requiring operatives to visit the office several times a day to collect their job lists and return numerous forms for job completion or notification of further work needed.

Staff in the call centre did not have up-to-date information on where operatives were or their progress with jobs, which in turn hampered service to customers calling in. The manual system provided plenty of opportunity for delay and error in reporting and communicating between the office, operatives and customers.

An internal working group was the first to identify the requirement for a mobile working solution for operatives, to help deliver continuous service improvement.

This was supported by messages from the Audit Commission regarding best practice in the delivery of a repairs and maintenance service for those who want to achieve 2-star rating.

The solution

Business Manager (Property Repairs) Glenda McLellan explains the initial evaluation process. "At the beginning management looked at what was available, and visited reference sites to get a better picture of how they worked. From there we produced a short list."

Stevenage Homes conducted a rigorous evaluation of these potential suppliers, rating their proposals on deliverability, system functionality, scalability, support usability and cost. The supplier accumulating the highest rating was 1st Touch.



Glenda McLellan comments: "As well as fitting the prescribed criteria, 1st Touch presented as the most knowledgeable supplier about our business and what we are trying to achieve. The company had a package that almost completely met our needs, and could be further configured to fit precisely. And we were impressed by the technology behind the solution."

1st Touch was required to provide a suitable solution for handheld devices that would replace paper forms, and to integrate that solution with Stevenage Homes' OPTI-TIME scheduling software and Northgate back-office system. Glenda remarks that: "We knew that 1st Touch already had experience of working with OPTI-TIME, and were confident of being able to integrate its technology with that of Northgate."

With the mobile solution now up and running, Brent O'Halloran, Director of Property Services is pleased to report that "In our latest inspection from the Audit Commission, we received a two stars and promising prospects for improvement rating. Our investment in the repairs mobile project has been a key component in delivering on our efficiency and performance improvement agenda."

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The benefits

Operatives now work with a paperless system. They receive all the information they need, and provide feedback, via an easy-to-use mobile device. These operatives no longer have to visit the office at least once a day to collect job orders and return forms, and can save time on filing and filing paperwork.

Jobs are assigned to the operatives one at a time. "This gives us more control over appointments," explains Glenda. "If one appointment overruns, another available operative can be assigned to the next job. This approach reduces the number of missed appointments."

Once an operative has accepted a job, the customer will be notified by OPTI-TIME through its messaging service, reducing the likelihood of customers missing appointments.

With the job completed, the operative immediately feeds back completion information, or notification of work that is still required. If the customer has highlighted other work during the appointment, the operative can notify the office of this too. Should the customer be dissatisfied for any reason, again the operative can input that information, and customer services can quickly arrange a call back or an inspection.

Future developments

"The whole process is being speeded up", says Kate Gascoigne, Project Manager on behalf of Stevenage Home. "We can also see potential for cost savings as well as time efficiencies as the solution helps move the service towards a more focused right-first-time operation.

The more information we can provide the operatives via the handheld device, the more likely that the operatives can get the job done on their first visit, improving customer satisfaction and reducing costs."

1st Touch is an integral part of the project to boost customer service and efficiency in the repairs service, which also includes revising repairs priorities and introducing national schedules of rates.

Amongst the added benefits of bringing in the 1st Touch mobile solution is remote stock ordering for the operatives vans. This is where the operatives can use their handheld device to order parts from the external supplier which will ensure tighter control and consistency over stock purchasing and reduce delays by getting the right stock to the right job in good time.

About 1st Touch

1st Touch has enabled dozens of field workforce-based organisations to painlessly embrace new mobile technologies and so achieve significant savings, greater productivity and more cost-effective use of resources.

Enterprise mobile technology enables organisations to completely transform existing paper-based working models into dynamic, flexible and efficient mobile working solutions.

1st Touch Mobile delivers three clear and unique benefits:

- Reduced costs to organisations because airtime is minimised and the system is always available – with or without airtime
- Flexibility through simple customer control over forms creation and amendment
- Integration to multiple back office and other enterprise software applications, so that data is entered only once.

1st Touch is the only mobile solution supplier to focus on this market and to have proven expertise in this sector. Ready to use applications deliver best practice workflow and enable dynamic data capture whilst enabling management oversight of work and operative status. Over 15% of this market has implemented 1st Touch with more joining every month.

1st Touch has created a range of modules for mobile workforce automation for this market. These modules represent specific areas of functionality required within the Social Housing environment, following a best practice approach to workflows, security, user access and management oversight.