



# Making Best Use of Stock at Midland Heart

Facing the challenges posed by welfare reform, Midland Heart selected Abrisitas to create a single housing portal that enables a more flexible approach to housing management. The new housing options-based service integrates transfers and mutual exchanges, supporting their key objective to assist customers to live in the right home when they need it.

### Introduction

Midland Heart is one of the largest housing and care organisations in the UK. Based in Birmingham, it owns and manages more than 32,000 homes across 54 local authority areas, providing and maintaining housing for over 70,000 people.

### Challenge

Prior to implementing an Abrisitas solution Midland Heart

had started to close down its own housing registers and allocate all homes through Local Authority nominations. A small register was maintained but this was difficult to manage and not transparent for customers, who were unhappy with these arrangements. They could not easily move across local authority boundaries and felt trapped in their homes as they received low levels of priority with local authorities.



Midland Heart has saved over £100,000 by being in control of its own systems and allocations and having greater control over shortlists means that re-let times have reduced and void loss is £40,000 lower than expected.

Midland Heart wanted to be able to control who had access to its homes and be in a position to offer housing and tenure mobility to its customers through a single online housing portal. The portal would enable customers to access a range of housing tenures through to home ownership and thereby underpin Midland Heart's Tenancy Policy of supporting customers to live in the right home for them when they most need it.

With the Welfare Reform Act and the need to enable under-occupying households to downsize so that they live in homes they can afford to sustain, the requirement for a more flexible approach to housing management became even more important.

The concept of the project was to develop a product (called Homes Direct) that other Housing Associations could participate in to create a pool of housing stock with flexible eligibility criteria. This approach would better support Midland Heart's customers and help participating housing organisations make best use of their housing stock.

### Solution

Midland Heart selected Abrisas to create its new Homes Direct housing portal, using the Housing Register, Choice Based Lettings, Mutual Exchange and Enhanced Housing Options software products.

Having experience with many local authority Choice Based Lettings (CBL) schemes, Midland Heart had found the Abrisas product to be superior in terms of functionality

in relation to customer access, back office usage and reporting, as well as being user friendly to both staff and customers. Midland Heart undertook a market comparison exercise to demonstrate that Abrisas provided best value to their organisation and signed a contract in August 2011, with the system going live in June 2012.

*"Abrisas has helped us to realise the potential of Homes Direct beyond general support. They have given us advice and guidance on making the best use of the system we have."*

David Taylor  
Deputy Director Customer & Communities, Midland Heart

The implementation was complicated somewhat when Midland Heart won the contract to run East Northamptonshire District Council's housing register and CBL service in December 2011, however Abrisas worked closely with Midland Heart to include this added requirement into the service specification and still go live by June 2012.

Describing the support received from Abrisas, David Taylor, Deputy Director Customer & Communities at Midland Hart explains *"Abrisas has helped us to realise the potential of the Homes Direct product beyond general support. They have given us advice and guidance on making the best of the system we have."*



*"What I like most about the Abrisas system is the ease of use for both customers and staff, plus Abrisas provides a professional and reliable service. They do what they promise."*

David Taylor

Deputy Director Customer & Communities, Midland Heart

Three housing associations and East Northamptonshire Council are now using the Homes Direct service.

### Benefits

The new system has enabled Midland Heart to provide a housing options-focused service that supports their key objective to assist customers to live in the right home when they need it. It has also helped them work with customers to consider alternative tenures and housing solutions.

Additionally Midland Heart and its partners have been able to access a wealth of intelligence on housing, care and the support needs of future customers and this is helping to design improved service offers.

In the first 3 months of launching Homes Direct Midland Heart received 11,000 applications and over 300 customers have been housed through the system. This includes homeless households who have secured homes outside of their local authority area.

David Taylor explains: *"It has been a real benefit to have a single housing portal for all Midland Heart customers to be directed to. We are able to effectively promote this housing solutions service that integrates transfers and mutual exchanges. This has been key to our strategy in relation to tenure reform and facing the challenges posed by welfare reform. Customers affected by welfare reform are able to register and start seeking alternative accommodation straight away."*

In terms of cost savings, Midland Heart has saved over £100,000 by being in control of its own systems and allocations. Having greater control over shortlists means that re-let times have reduced and void loss is £40,000 lower than expected.

It is anticipated that Homes Direct will enable Midland Heart and its partner registered providers to minimise the impact of welfare reforms and make best use of existing housing stock.

*"It has been a real benefit to have a single housing portal for all Midland Heart customers to be directed to. We are able to effectively promote this housing solution service that integrates transfers and mutual exchanges."*

David Taylor

Deputy Director Customer & Communities, Midland Heart

Describing what he likes most about the Abrisas system. David Taylor explains *"Ease of use for customers and staff, plus Abrisas provides a professional and reliable service, they do what they promise."*

### Future Plans

Homes Direct will continue to grow, with more emphasis placed on expanding the use of the mutual exchange functionality. Plus Midland Heart is considering the Housing Advice & Homelessness module.