



Streamlining services & improving efficiency in Newport

Facing the challenges posed by multiple disparate systems and working in partnership with its 10 RSL partners, Newport City Council selected Abritas' web based common housing register and integrated housing needs and supporting people system to improve efficiency and streamline services to customers.

Introduction

Standing at the gateway between England and Wales, Newport City Council (Newport) is the 8th largest unitary authority in Wales, serving a population of over 140,000 residents.

Following a stock transfer in 2009 of over 9,000 properties to

Newport City Homes, the council no longer owns any social housing stock; however it continues to hold a housing register in partnership with the housing associations in Newport and advertises all social housing vacancies to rent and affordable housing to buy in Newport via its Home Options Newport portal.



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Simon Rose
Housing Needs Manager, Newport City Council

Challenges

Prior to implementing an Abrisas solution Newport City Council (Newport) used an Anite housing system for allocating social housing and recording expenditure and homelessness records. Additionally they used separate Microsoft Access databases for advice and prevention, as well as Excel spreadsheets for support records and providing information to other internal council services. Each partner housing association also had their own allocation system.

Having adopted an agile working policy and process, the council decided it needed to streamline services, improve customer experience and provide a more co-ordinated response to tackling housing need utilising all partners' housing stock in the most productive manner. Therefore in partnership with its 10 RSL partners it initiated a project to create a common housing register.

Following a tender process, Newport created a specification to enable the evaluation of web based systems that provided a roving solution with ease of access for all partners. The assessment involved all partners that would be using the solution and focused on the service users' views, as it was important to ensure that they would be happy using the chosen system.

Solution

Newport selected an Abrisas solution primarily because of its simplicity and ease of access. Partners felt that the system offered a simple process combined with robust performance data and easy reporting tools that would enhance and inform service delivery and strategic outputs. Importantly because everything is stored in a single system it also allows for staff to work from a

variety of locations without paper and large case files.

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In addition to Housing Register, the council also implemented the Abrisas Choice Based Lettings, Housing Advice & Homelessness, Tenancies & Rents, Enhanced Housing Options and Supporting People modules. The implementation for all the modules was phased over an 18 month period as requested by the council.

Describing the support provided by Abrisas, Simon Rose, Housing Needs Manager at Newport City Council comments:

"The support throughout the whole process could not be faulted. There has and continues to be a positive and open dialogue with issues being dealt with quickly and efficiently. The assistance from support on day to day issues is excellent."



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Housing Needs Manager, Newport City Council

Benefits

By implementing a completely integrated web-based system, the housing team has rationalised its workload and greatly reduced the amount of data inputting required. This has freed up time for officers to focus on casework and dealing with customers rather than entering data across a range of different systems and spreadsheets.

Simon Rose explains further:

"We are able to share information easily and in a structured way with a range of partners, which again improves efficiency and customer satisfaction, as customers only see a single body and experience a seamless service. We also now have one database to record all of the department's work across a range of teams leading to less duplication of effort and energy to achieve the same outcomes."

Customers are also positive in their comments and now have more information at their disposal in order to make more informed choices. Newport has also been able to develop stronger partnerships and develop additional services based on the interaction between modules and the ease of access.

In terms of cost savings, time has been the largest saving, Simon Rose explains:

"From being able to divert staff from data inputting and monitoring, to actually undertaking more effective work with clients has allowed services to be more joined up and pro-active in addressing local needs."

The system has completely changed the way the housing team operates, in particular it uses a lot less paper and enables staff to be more agile. It has also allowed for a greater level of information sharing without the need for sending excessive emails and spreadsheets. Partnership working has become easier and more open and honest as a result, leading to greater involvement across a range of agendas.

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In response to the question "What do you like most about the Abritas system?" Simon explains:

"The connectivity between the modules provides a great opportunity to create efficiency. The ease of use and access allows for the system to be used in multiple locations, with the only restriction being the internet connection. This has transformed working practices and allowed the department to adapt to the changing environment within the council around agile working, the paperless office and being altogether more efficient and better at what we do and deliver to residents."

Conclusion

Simon summarises his recommendations to other organisations considering a new IT solution:

"Adopting a new system can always be difficult, daunting and sometimes traumatic. Abritas' approach allowed for open and honest discussions around the issues and requirements to ensure that our system was developed in our way. You need to think carefully about what you want, be clear about what you are aiming for and be prepared to accept changes, compromise where necessary and be guided by Abritas on their experience of implementing systems. The service provided is highly professional with the added personal touch."

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