

# Award – NHMF – Best Practice within Repairs

Client organisation that was best at meeting resident's needs in the provision of a maintenance service

Client - Notting Hill Housing Trust

Repairs Partner – Connaught Plc

Project Sponsor - David Mclean (Head of Repairs)

Why we are entering this award;

- Our project is based on the simplistic concept that our residents trust us to provide them the service that best reflects their needs specifically around the maintenance of their homes. We believe that the project that we are putting forward for this award reflects the desire of the repairs service at Notting Hill Housing Trust and that of our partner Connaught Plc to ensure that we make every effort in achieving a first class provision of services to our residents.

**We are immensely proud of what we have all achieved and we hope that our submission is successful.**

What was wrong with our Repairs Service? The problem

- Poor communication was the route cause that our service was not delivering the standards that our residents, partners and those involved at NHHT within repairs wished to achieve.
- Our processes were wrong and were not customer driven.
- Our staff and that of our partners' were becoming frustrated by historic methods of service delivery.
- Past projects had not always been successful so we were nervous of projects.

**We needed to change and therefore a solution was needed.**

Our project

- We wanted seamless communication both ways between the Housing System at NHHT and that of our contractors'.
- We wanted a joint approach to delivery of services with client and contractor teams working together to design a winning repairs service and where possible working from the same facility.

- We wanted our residents to be able to have an appointment confirmed at first call and have faith that the tradesperson would be there on the agreed date and time.
- We wanted a solution that was based on the reduction of paper and that allowed our resources to be better utilised.
- We wanted to have the best IT solution that allowed a seamless approach.

### **What is Innovative about our project?**

#### **What way is it innovative**

- We chose an independent project manager and therefore not via reputed project management companies, agencies or internal. PMCDE Limited is a one person company who was recommended to us by a future partner who had used their services before.
- We chose to undertake two projects in one go that of 2 way full XML file transfers between our contractors housing systems and that of our own as well as the development of an appointment scheduling system with a full mobile solution.
- The mobile solution would be built by one of our contractors and therefore we would not procure an off the shelf solution.
- We designed processes jointly with our partnering contractors' and started to move from traditional client/contractor relations to more of a partnering approach.
- We moved some of Connaught's staff into the offices of NHTT so that they work alongside our Customer Support Teams.
- Our contractors and NHTT have both jointly invested in the projects.
- Our project approach was based on openness and the project team that was selected represented all partners with free debate and inclusion.

#### **Why was the innovation necessary?**

- We set ourselves a very ambitious agenda for the projects and we wanted a project manager who shared our ethos specifically around the strong value of people.
- To do such a huge change process in one go was high risk, however, the delivery of these projects separately would have taken a significant amount of time.
- Connaught Plc was going to design a mobile platform and therefore the opportunity was open within this contract to develop that.
- We have clearly defined boundaries with that of the client and that of the contractor; however, we believed that the delivery of a new repairs service required a more joint approach with ideas coming from both sides.

- The cost of the projects needed a joint investment as without this then the project scope would have had to have been reduced or potentially the projects could have not been commissioned.
- We wanted a more inclusive approach with client and contractor teams working together so that any issues could be dealt with immediately without the need for time delays.
- The project team and the approach that was taken were inclusive due to the insistent of the Project Manager and the need to deliver on the business plan without any restrictions.

#### **How did the innovation evolve?**

- It initially started with the idea and then we had to choose the project manager and after the procurement of PMCDE Limited we started to prepare our approach.
- The project used NHHT project methodology but the majority was PRINCE 2. We got the team right in the first instance and although the style of meetings and deliverables maybe seen eccentric to those not involved we got people working to such a high pace through considerable humour, which was probably as important to the success of this project as the IT solutions that were evolved.
- We already knew what our residents issues were with the service due to initial research and therefore we slowly developed our vision based on more openness and engagement internally and externally.
- We realised the project was going to be a success earlier on as the people factor within the project team was excellent. We had the best of the best and it's hard to select those that were more important to our success than others but the impact of the Project Manager for Connaught Plc, NHHT Project Support and that of the Project Manager from XMbrace was significant.
- We spent a long time on ensuring that communication was right, processes would work, training and testing of the solutions. Our projects are not IT driven they are people driven.

#### **How do you expect it to grow?**

- We are already looking at delivering a surveyor solution which will be fully mobile and interfaced with all NHHT systems including CRM and have again procured PMCDE Limited.
- An additional phase would be web based access and monitoring for residents relating to appointments and progress.
- We employ local tradespersons as well and we would be looking at them being part of the IT solution but only if this did not impair their small business status.

### **How do you monitor how affective it is?**

- We have a quality monitoring team who liaise with our residents to ensure that their service needs are now being delivered in a more reliable and customer driven approach.
- We do random calls to residents after repairs have been undertaken to ensure that they are satisfied with the repairs. All mobile devices have customer sign of features and customer satisfaction forms are left.
- We monitor first time completions, cancelations any occurrence that affects the original appointment date and time changing.
- We have regular staff meetings and we send both client and contractor staff on the same courses.
- We have our residents' forums where the solution is addressed as well as open discussions on how we can continue to enhance the service.

### **What are the benefits to the Residents, Contactor and client?**

#### **How does it enable the client and contractor to provide a better or more efficient service?**

- The 2 way file exchanges allow a seamless communication between systems in relation to core housing and business information. The majority of this functionally is now instant where previous it required paper chases, meetings, postal delivery as well as hand and duplication from both sides. This enables staff from both NHHT and Connaught to concentrate more on quality inspections increased interaction with residents and more time to deal with emergencies or priority works. It's really based on transparency and enabling technology to really improve the dynamics of the service.
- The appointment scheduling solution has enabled all appointments to be made at first call where previously it was only 50% and those that were being appointed were being delivered via a make shift approach. NHHT went for the big bang approach going fully mobile so all operatives are in the field all the time and with full text messaging confirmation to residents as well as customer satisfaction calls immediately after a job has been completed. This is possible due to the fact that NHHT Customer Services Team sits with the Connaught Planners and therefore both have visibility of when works are completed as the operative has to complete the job on his handset so as to request the next job and this automatically is shown back on the screens at NHHT offices.
- The joint approach to process design was also beneficial as it evolved a service that actually delivers on its objectives to the residents. We believe that we have broken down many of the barriers with communication between client and Contractor and therefore this project has significantly improved our relationship as well as understanding of each other business. The process also delivered new ways of working with both evening and weekend appointments being introduced allowing even greater flexibility for residents.

- The integration of teams has been a tremendous success as we are now getting to that stage of a one team approach which is great for us and our partner but also benefits the resident.
- The partnership that we have now established due to this project does not always run smoothly but what it has enabled us to do is sort out the issues in a more open manner and therefore achieving greater results. The staff from both sides can also see that historic issues that could not be resolved previously have now dramatically improved and therefore people can see that real progress is being made.

### **What improvements are being experienced with residents?**

There are a number of significant benefits now that we see have been delivered by this project which are:

- Residents can now receive an appointment for both urgent and non urgent works relating to their first call. The appointments and scheduling are now within a controlled environment therefore the availability of more convenient times and more responsiveness has improved.
- There is greater availability of time slots including school runs and now evening and weekend appointments.
- The tradesperson cannot leave an address if there is no access until the planners makes contact with the residents to ensure that they are not within the near vicinity and can return home.
- After each appointment confirmation the resident will receive an automated text to confirm the date and time of the appointment. A reminder will also be sent 48 hours beforehand and when the operative is on route.
- If there is any additional repairs required other than the appointed repair the tradesperson can call the planner to see if further works could be undertaken at that time or if another appointment can be made therefore removing any stress specifically to our elderly residents.
- Because our tradespersons are all mobile now we can deal with emergencies instantly and we can additionally bring repairs forward if this is convenient with our residents.
- We will call our residents after the repair has been completed hopefully within 15 minutes to ensure that they are happy with the works and that if they have any further concerns they can be dealt with at that time.
- One of the benefits that sometimes is unseen is the positive affect that this project has had on staff morale as due to the improvements' in processes and control of appointments our staff know exactly what needs to be delivered on each day and therefore they are less stressed and more focused and therefore this confidence will be seen by our residents.

- If residents have any concerns they can be dealt with as the contractors' team sits within the client team and therefore there can be at times an instant resolution to issues.

#### **What evidence do you have of the benefits in each case?**

- All of the 2 way file exchanges are working and therefore a seamless approach and staff from both sides functionally has changed such as for instance Connaught supervisors were virtually office bound and are now spending most of their time undertaking quality checks on site.
- We are now delivering a fully appointable service, the two staff teams have been integrated and all tradespersons are on a mobile PDA which is fully imbedded within the system interfaces allowing real time visibility.
- All of the new processes are being delivered within the field and evening and weekend appointment slots are available to residents who wish them.
- We have regular feedback meetings from the joint teams and the progress is positive. We don't always guarantee that we get things right first time but there is a commitment from all involved to aim for this.
- We know staffs are more satisfied within their roles as we have regular feedback sessions and the suggestions put forward from both client and contractor staffs are dealt with and then reported back to those who had the original ideas. Operatives' are more content now that no access is now only minimal and therefore jobs can be completed as per appointment.
- Connaught have highlighted productivity in the first two quarters' has gone up by 15% with a further 15% objective for the second quarters as Standard Minute Values are being revised and jobs will be shortly received on a one job at a time bases where currently its two.
- Feedback from the quality monitoring team at NHHT relating to some of the comments that they have had from the tenants are:-
  1. That they were really happy with the fact they were getting the appointment at first point of contact this gave them the opportunity to plan their week/day efficiently as before they had to wait for days to get an appointment.
  2. They also commented regarding the text message reminders. They love the fact that they receive a text message reminder before their repair as sometimes they forget the appointment.

**Does it also contribute to meeting the government's efficiency targets and/or sustainability targets?**

The key areas relating to sustainability would come from the following;

- Reduction in fuel from contractors vans as every tradespersons routes are now preplanned starting from the nearest resident's appointment to that of the tradespersons home address and then planned on a route that minimizes travel to the final appointment being as near to the tradespersons address.
- Significant reduction in paper as nearly every mechanism can be automated for example. It allows for direct invoicing, cutting back from 30,000 invoices into weekly direct batch invoices which Notting Hill can approve in one process.

The key areas relating to efficiency targets would come from the following;

- We have not had to make cuts in the service that we deliver what we have achieved is utilizing our resources in a more proactive way specifically relating to changes peoples role from back office to more customer focused.
- The projects, however, will ultimately ensure the delivery of efficiencies' as the processes now behind the project have ensured greater control and streamlining of service deliverables. We feel however, it's about getting the service right for residents prior to looking at what efficiencies can be made.

**Does it have any wider community benefits?**

- The projects were about promoting local contractors' as well as that of the core contractors that we use. Within the lifecycle of the project we moved from two core contractors to one as the standards and service delivery were irregular and it was important that what we said we could deliver, we actually did and therefore a singular core partner was more affective.
- We feel however, that local contractors some as small as one tradesman can also offer our residents a service which sometimes is more personalized and therefore the projects have been delivered to not lose sight of this value but to enhance the service delivery that they can.

**What were the financial costs and cashable benefits?**

**What were the costs in developing and implementing the best practice services?**

- The costs for all project activities 'were just over £220,000 which was procured within an agreement by both Notting Hill Housing Trust and its primary partner Connaught Ltd. The exact details are confidential.

**What are the additional costs or financial savings in running the services, and from what do they arise?**

- Additional costs come from increased licences if needed and service support agreements for interfaces, APIs and solutions.
- The financial savings will occur from streamlining business processes and by more effective deliverables appropriate staffing structures for both partners. As previously highlighted Connaught productivity gains is currently 15% and that is only in the first half of the go live period.

**How do you measure the financial benefits?**

- Comparisons' with budget spend compared to previous years and assessing indirect and direct costs.

**Is there any independent audit of these benefits?**

- No

**How are these benefits shared between the parties?**

- They are not as each partner will benefit it different ways and therefore it is up to each partner to be responsible for delivering any benefits and those savings will stay with the individual partner.

**How do you expect these to change in the future?**

- The solution should lead to more accurate staffing structures that reflect what is actually been delivered and required.

**What lessons might be learned by other organisations?**

**What kinds of organisation might benefit from a similar approach, and how might they identify themselves?**

- Any housing provider such as Local Authority, Association, Trust. The technology is very much based on the repairs section but can easily transcend into planned works as well as Gas and electrical works.

**How much does its success depend on your own unique circumstances? What expertise is needed to make it a success?**

- Our success was based partly on how well the project team gelled as a unit with all involved contributing to the ultimate delivery. The circumstances are not unique as the repairs industry is very similar. What is needed to deliver a successful project,



however, is the people factor and the mutual respect for all involved either internally or externally.

- The project approach and methodology was also personalised to our needs and sometimes you lose this by employing larger project management companies.

#### **What training would be needed by managers and operational staff?**

- We implemented within the project team our own project support via our Senior Quality Monitoring Officer to work alongside our consultant project manager. This worked extremely well and therefore as the project developed our SQMO gained the project skills to undertake future projects which were a critical factor for us.
- There was quite a lot of training required for managers and office staff relating to the new protocols, processes and system changes but this was carefully planned within the project plans and therefore there was minimal disruption.
- Tradespersons had training on the mobile solution and the effect of an appointment system. This went extremely well and we continued to work with tradespersons to resolve any issues that they observed. We continued feedback sessions for six months after go live which resulted in the continuous improvements to the solution.

#### **How might you do it differently if you started over again at another organisation?**

- Would probably look for a shorter delivery of the solution and would move the process mapping to the beginning of the solution rather than near the end.
- Would ensure that the project mandate was sounder and that there was a clear initial business case when seeking project funding.
- Would not waste time on looking for other suppliers for appointment/scheduling systems as apart from bespoke there is only one supplier.
- Would implement project support controls at an early stage as the size of the project made this essential.

#### **Where can they go for assistance or more information?**

- David Mclean – Head of Repairs (Notting Hill Housing Trust) [dmclean@nhhg.org.uk]

#### **Conclusion**

- We have all taken immense pride in what has been achieved and at times like all projects there has been high pressurised times specifically around delivery, but most of all we have had great fun which is not always evident in many projects. The project scale/scope was high risk but we were determined to make it work and we did.
- We created in many aspects a new repairs service within a short time frame, a new mobile solution, integrated working and in many aspects a full solution. Our staffs, colleagues are more content within their working environment and we have a forward thinking partnership with our primary contractor Connaught. We have plans to continue new initiatives within the same project approach.

- Our primary aim was to improve the lives of our residents and take out the stress and anxiety that sometimes occurs with household repairs and we believe we have achieved this.

### **Award**

Therefore I take pleasure in nominating all of those connected with the project including those who have delivered the project and those who have supported colleagues when they have been undertaking project related works as well as our partners and friends.

### **Our team**

- Northgate Information Solutions – Jarrod Sampson, Tom Clarke and Barry Starkey
- XMbrace – Nick Jefferies, Richard Winch, Nick Shipton, Keith Wood
- Connaught’s Sponsor and Director – Tony Rodgers
- Connaught Project Team – Christo Muller, Mathew Smith, Rosie McEvoy
- For the tradespersons and back office team at Connaught for their patience and hard work in delivering the changes
- Connaught’s lead planner – Lucy Cochrane
- Notting Hill IT Department – Specifically Florence Ogunseitan
- Notting Hill Marketing – Pilar Garcia
- Notting Hill Repairs Team and John Olaiton
- Notting Hills Customer Service Team – Specifically Rod Perry, Julia Waters
- Notting Hill Administration Team – Ana Teixeira, Olena Tsikalovska
- Our Residents Board
- Project Support - Gilem Komur
- Richard Barker – Project Manager (PMCDE Limited)