

Martlet Homes introduces real-time mobile working solution from Blackbay

Martlet Homes is rolling out Blackbay's Service Connect field service mobile worker solution to its mobile tradesmen, which will drive greater productivity and provide improved customer service to over 5,000 homes.

Martlet Homes is successful Registered Social Landlord committed to providing and maintaining quality, affordable homes in West Sussex. In introducing Service Connect real-time mobile service management software from Blackbay, Martlet is using technology to join the vanguard of organisations that are raising the bar on standards of professionalism and accountability in the social housing sector.

Martlet's in-house team of tradesmen currently processes over 14,000 individual responsive repair orders each year. Martlet is integrating Service Connect with its Orchard housing management system and OptiTime scheduling system. This will allow the organisation to track its service personnel, allocate maintenance tasks in real-time, and offer more dependable appointment times to customers. The initial pilot sees Blackbay's Service Connect rolled out to 20 users, increasing to 45 in April and building to a total of 80 users by the summer, to include gas service engineers and electrical inspect and test operatives.

The new system enables tradesmen to receive their jobs on a hand-held device and their managers to receive job status information in real time, increasing the visibility of each tradesman's activity levels and job status. Adjustments to tradesmen's schedules can be made throughout the day to ensure they are kept fully occupied, with jobs allocated according to priority and smaller tasks fitted in as needed. The net result is improved worker efficiency at reduced cost and a reduction in the average number of days taken to complete each job, which means benefits all round.

Says Valerie Adler, Business Initiatives & Programme Manager at Martlet, "We are always looking for ways to improve the way we work. Our investment in this integrated solution improves both the speed at which we can attend to our customers' needs, and the overall quality of the services we deliver."

Martlet evaluated Blackbay alongside two competing products, using a weighted evaluation matrix approach which enabled it to compare products not only on price, but on perceived quality of the solution. On their decision to go with Blackbay, Adler comments, "Blackbay offered a combination of competitive pricing and robust technology. What impressed us most about Blackbay was their interest in our current business processes, and their focus on delivering a tailored solution that could evolve as we identify areas for further improvement." The web-based solution is provided on a fully hosted and managed service basis, which means that Martlet has not needed to purchase or maintain any additional hardware.

Martlet expected there to be certain cultural challenges around the change to working practices and migrating from a paper-based system into a real-time environment, where tradesmen using

hand-held devices are essentially far more 'visible' throughout the day. However, these were mitigated by the improvements in administration and the removal of the responsibility for extensive paperwork, which proved to be a real morale booster within the trades team.

Although a not-for-profit organisation, Martlet competes for work in the open market and seeks to expand its operation, so achieving high standards of cost control, efficiency and professionalism is vital to the organisation's continued success. Says Adler, "While organisations like Martlet Homes are not commercial by nature, we still have to be credible players in our industry. Increasing bottom line relies on either making more, or spending less. We believe that adopting this new way of working will enable us to do the latter, and at the same time deliver an even better service to our customers."

Whilst it is still early days, Martlet is expecting that the new system will reduce their labour costs for responsive repairs by around 10% and allow for greater control of both labour and materials costs, and improved stock control. Alongside a reduction in paperwork comes an improvement in the timeliness and accuracy of management information. As well as improving the quality of service to their customers, Martlet will also be able to gather customer satisfaction data in real-time, which will allow for more timely and efficient problem solving.

Larry Klimczyk, managing director of Blackbay says, "We're delighted to be working with Martlet Homes on improving its service management systems. By working closely with Xbrace and Martlet to ensure our solution fits exactly with their current processes, we aim to deliver real business value and a return on investment through increased visibility, efficiency and customer service improvements."