

CAPITA

Case Study

London Borough of Southwark



Background

Helping vulnerable people to receive the services that they need as efficiently and effectively as possible is a major responsibility for local authorities. Under the UK Government's Supporting People programme, local authorities are responsible for implementing housing-related services – both long and short-term – to cater to the needs of a range of vulnerable people including the homeless, people with alcohol and drug problems, victims of domestic violence and the elderly.

As an inner-city local authority the London Borough of Southwark deals with thousands of individuals that face many of these challenges. The borough's Referral Assessment and Resettlement team (RARS) works with service providers involved in around 70 projects and more than 1100 units of short-term supported accommodation that offer support, shelter and services to a wide range of vulnerable people in the borough.

Addressing complexity

Until recently the process of commissioning services and referring vulnerable people to service providers was managed using largely paper-based methods or manual data entry into a series of spreadsheets. Dealing with complex problems and a large number of service providers inevitably meant that the system of administration used by Southwark was not as efficient as the authority wished.

The Southwark RARS team handles more than 50 'voids' (ie a vacated place in a temporary accommodation unit or project) each month and needs to make sure that those that need help can take up empty places with as little delay as possible. Aware that their system of administration was not delivering as well as it could, and determined to seek improvement, Southwark's Supporting People Business Unit put out a tender for a new system that would help them to automate their business processes.

Having selected CDP Soft's Sharp product, Southwark set about working in partnership with the software developer to develop design and build a new system.



Immediate benefits

The new system has been in place since December 2007 and already significant benefits are being felt by all stakeholders: the Southwark RARS team, service providers and of course the vulnerable people that the system supports.

Jonathan Lillistone, manager of Southwark's Supporting People business unit, describes the new system's success: "Business processes have remained fundamentally the same – but their execution has been transformed and that is perhaps the reason why the system has been so enthusiastically adopted by all staff - they really experience the benefits in their daily work. It is, after all, a tool designed to help them do their jobs more effectively and focus on what matters which is delivering the right services to the people that need them."

Built from the ground up

The new system was designed from the ground up. Much more than a back-office support solution, it was designed to address the needs of team members working with providers and clients on the front line. Rather than attempting a major change in business processes, Southwark were looking for a platform that would support their current business processes far more effectively and efficiently. They needed, for instance, to cut the time lags between service providers registering a void or vacancy and that space being filled by an individual with relevant needs. Relying on manual entry used to mean that vacancies could take a number of days to show up on the system. Today it's a matter of seconds.

Matching clients' needs to provision is the core role of the new system. Availability of places at any one of the 70 number of projects in Southwark is kept up to date by service providers who share appropriate access to the system. The RARS team is able to enter the details of a client and see an immediate match between the needs that the individual has and whether there is the right support available to them.

Speed of response

In many of the situations that referrers face it is critical to get an individual help as soon as possible. Referrers may first encounter a vulnerable individual in a variety of circumstances, and in many cases the ability to access the relevant services fast is very important.

To enable a fast response the system is accessible via a web browser. Any authorised user is therefore able to gain immediate access to a live database of service providers which shows where suitable vacancies exist, matching vulnerable people's needs exactly and quickly with the type of services that they require.

Whereas in the past the referral process for a client would require a series of forms to be completed and telephone calls between referrer and provider, today's system allows data to be captured immediately online and shared throughout the system.

This means that vulnerable people are less likely to receive a delay in receiving the help that they need – and the RARS team can focus on its core responsibilities rather than the administration and paperwork that the manual system necessitated.



Enhanced strategic planning

But as well as transforming the efficiency of administration, the new system is beginning to show additional value through the information and tools that it provides for analysis and planning of services. With limited resources at its disposal, it is critical that Southwark is able to target services where they are most needed. The system now provides information and data that can help with planning and provisioning for future years, as Jonathan Lillistone explains:

"The system now provides much better performance management information and intelligence on how well the RARs team is doing their job. And also because we fund the supported housing projects, we can monitor not only the team coordinating the referrals and assessment team, we can now see with much greater clarity and transparency exactly how our providers are performing.

Over time through the system we will be able to track the outcomes for service users moving through supported housing, providing data on the stocks and flows into, between and on from projects. Not only that, before our strategic planning was reliant on drawing inferences from various data sources , now we are able to rely on concrete information from the system so there will be no doubt that we have a complete picture of what is happening."

Building shared client case histories

The new system not only eradicates duplicative processes and minimise the chances of a client's details being lost, it also allows a consistent case history to be built up. This is particularly important in the way that the system delivers management information that can be used to pinpoint where resources are most needed and can therefore drive strategic planning. This drives focusing resources where the patterns of use indicate that they are most required and allows services to build around the needs of individuals.

A better service to providers

Service providers too have seen considerable benefits since the new systems was introduced. For them, any delay in filling vacant places means a loss of rental income. The new system's ability to provide a continuously updated database of service provision and voids means that the time lag between a space becoming available and its allocation to a vulnerable individual has been dramatically reduced.

And because the system allows service providers to manage their own administration, there are far fewer bureaucratic barriers for them to manage in keeping the RARS team up to date with the vacant places that they have. Having used the system for a year many providers have reported that their turnaround time for vacant spaces has been cut by a significant margin. For example, one large hostel reports that the average duration of vacancies is down from 5-6 days under the old system to only 2-3 days today.

A continuous journey of improvement

The system continues to develop. Southwark's Jonathan Lillistone sees great potential for the future, as he explains: "What we have now is the ability to manage a client's complete journey. And because it is a shared system, everyone who needs to has secure access to the system, which makes it very flexible and adaptable. Now that more local authorities are adopting the system the value it provides can only improve – especially in London. After all, single homeless people don't respect local authority boundaries. And many of our providers work across a number of London boroughs too so there is clear added value in them using the same system. All in all it's been a very good piece of work to date and one from which we expect to see more and more benefits."

CDP's Sharp product is now branded as Capita Support and is exclusively distributed by Capita Software Services

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