

Westlea Housing

Achieves quick turnaround with bespoke mobile solution

About the company:

Working throughout Wiltshire and Swindon, Westlea Housing Association provides over 6,000 rented homes to people with a range of housing needs. With a turnover of £25 million and over 230 employees based in their headquarters in Chippenham, Wiltshire, Westlea is a sizable local enterprise.



The challenge:

Westlea's revenues derive from the rental income generated through letting its properties. As Tenants move home and houses become empty, it is the association's responsibility to carry out any repairs that are necessary to ensure that the property meets the minimum standards for re-letting to its next occupiers.

The association recognised that its existing process for recording and effecting repairs could be optimised using mobile technology in order to reduce the total number of days a property might remain unoccupied.

As part of the existing repairs process, inspectors visit the empty property, manually record the status and then note down any repairs that are necessary. On their return to the office this data is entered onto the computer system and converted into work orders that are sent to either the inhouse team or external contractors.

Westlea's Head of IT Rob Fletcher explains, "An empty home could be visited on a Monday or Tuesday, but repair orders might not be sent to the contractor until later that week at the earliest." Westlea has strict targets for the re-letting of empty homes, and, as Rob Fletcher continues, "The delays associated with recording repairs and then subsequently allocating the work to contractors could mean that a property might be standing empty for a week or more before any work was even ordered. This latent delay means that each home is typically empty for at least a week more than it actually needs to be because of the slow start in effecting repairs."

The solution:

Recognising that mobile technology could be used to address these issues, Rob Fletcher and his team scanned the market for a suitable off-the-shelf system to streamline the process. Finding none available, they approached Kelros, for help with defining and building a tailor-made system.

"We chose Kelros because we were already familiar with them as a supplier and were happy with the quality of their work," says Rob Fletcher, "Plus they represented good value for money, something that is always important."

Kelros helped Westlea define what they wanted to achieve, and delivered a bespoke solution that enables each inspector to enter data and repair orders directly onto a tablet computer. This then pushes the survey data and repair orders back via a mobile data connection onto the central server. Internal staff then filter this into work orders for contractors and in-house teams.

The time lag between the inspection and the generation of work orders has reduced from up to five days to a same day turnaround. This represents an impressive time saving for Westlea and as the details are recorded only once by the inspector it also reduces the burden of re-keying and risk of double-handling information.

The benefits:

The primary benefit of this innovation lies in reducing the time taken to contract repair orders from five days or more to the same day that the property is inspected. This helps Westlea meet its re-letting targets therefore minimising lost revenue from each property. The time that a property now spends empty between lets has reduced from 37 days to 21 days, saving Westlea some £45,000 since the system's introduction.



Working together

Westlea's ethos supports establishing a consensus to deliver strategic change management successfully. As Rob Fletcher explains; "It was important for us to gain the buy-in from the key stakeholders in the new system. A not-for-profit organisation has a different approach to commercial organisations." Rob Fletcher adds, "Kelros took this on board, and we were impressed with the efforts taken to make the relationship work."

The future

The Void Inspections application is an evolving one as Westlea takes advantage of advances in mobile technology and hardware. The application itself is being extended into Phase Two, which will include pre-populating the survey with property attributes to further reduce the time taken on each inspection.

About Kelros

Kelros specialises in messaging and social collaboration solutions built on IBM software for clients in all sectors.

Our aim is to provide clients with an industry-leading proposition, combining our deep understanding of the challenges businesses face with expert and detailed knowledge of the technology solutions. We offer a full range of services from consultation and development of a bespoke solution, through to deployment, training and ongoing support.

Established in 1996, Kelros has developed long-standing partnerships with clients through its range of integrated, easy to deploy solutions for sales and marketing, human resources, finance and operations.

All of our technical consultants are IBM-certified with extensive specialist experience in IBM Connections, Sametime, Domino & Notes. We have a dedicated support team, which supports hosted and on premise applications and messaging infrastructure for over 120 clients.

A key Kelros differentiator is IBM software licensing. Through optimized licensing agreements and dual entitlement licensing, we ensure our clients have low software acquisition costs and minimal administration tasks, whilst maximising the benefits of IBM solutions.

Kelros IBM Expertise



Kelros Software and Tools



IBM Verse & Connections

IBM Connections is a set of secure, easy-to-use collaboration tools. It combines email, messaging, online document editing and conferencing to facilitate seamless teamwork.

IBM Verse sits within IBM Connections. It's an email hosting solution that users can access from their desktop or mobile device. IBM Verse uses social analytics to help users focus on important content and collaborate easier.

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