South Gloucestershire Council reduces costs and improves its StreetCare service with Job Manager

South Gloucestershire Council increased its field worker job rate by 36 per cent, shortened response times by 57 per cent and reduced operational costs by £500,000 per year after implementing mobile working and scheduling software from Advanced.

South Gloucestershire Council serves a community with a population of approximately 270,000 in the South West of England. As with many public sector organisations in recent years, we have been facing the significant challenge of maintaining service levels despite having to make spending cuts.

Increasing efficiency of StreetCare services

To tackle this, we commissioned a Service Review Programme to uncover potential savings throughout our organisation. The review led to recommendations that could create £45m of savings; part of these savings would be made by the implementation of new technology to make front-line services more efficient.

StreetCare was one of our first services to go through this transformation strategy. The facility incorporates many front-line and safety-critical activities including highway maintenance, abandoned vehicles, dog wardens, fly-tipping, graffiti, litter, grounds & parks maintenance and tree officers. However, while the business process relied upon staff being in the field to deliver these services, they were often hampered by not having modern IT systems to support their work.

Mobile working and job scheduling

To overcome these challenges, we implemented the mobile application, Job Manager, from Advanced. This enables 90 field workers to receive and complete work on a mobile device, while office-based staff benefit from scheduling software and management capabilities. While the focus of the strategy was providing workers with mobile applications, it was the job scheduling that delivered the real revelation.

Nina Deverall, our Project Manager for Transformation and Efficiency, says, "The job scheduling software automatically allocates jobs to field worker devices as soon as they are created in our CRM system, rather than relying on a supervisor to manually allocate the work. Although the system is fully automated, the supervisor remains in total control of the teams and work and can override any element of the system — for example to deal with a vehicle breakdown. The supervisor therefore 'manages by exception' and eliminates hours previously required for work allocation, freeing them to improve planning and management of their resources. Additionally, the lag between job creation and completion is now significantly reduced, providing a terrific improvement for our KPIs.

Client >
South Gloucestershire Council

Sector >
Local government

Project >
Implementing mobile working and scheduling solutions

"The scheduling software is able to... ensure work is sent to the right person with the right skills at the right time... and makes sure high priority work is undertaken first."

Nina Deverall > Project Manager for Transformation and Efficiency > South Gloucestershire Council

A more efficient service for our residents

"The scheduling software is able to automatically allocate work to staff in this way as it uses rules that ensure work is sent to the right person with the right skills at the right time. It even allocates work optimally to ensure high priority work is undertaken first. In the office, the job scheduling screen is updated with new colours and highlights to reflect the real-time job updates being returned from the mobile application. This is significant as it gives managers real-time visibility of service performance. Previously, to get this level of information, managers would have to visit or ring around 90 field staff, which was time-intensive and, with other work commitments, often not even possible. Now they have the information to properly plan and react."

Improved productivity in the office and field

Mark King, Head of StreetCare, adds, "The system is able to directly allocate work instructions to active gangs on the ground, mitigating the need for inspection and in turn reducing lost time and paperwork. The system is integrated through to the council's front-office systems, which enables call centre staff to see where jobs are in the process, allowing them to give informed responses to repeat calls, which in itself has saved repeat visits by busy inspection teams.

"This is also being rolled out to the council web site, allowing the same information to be available to residents and users of the services that the council undertake. The support Advanced has provided through development has been first class and enabled all key stakeholders to have their input into the development of the system."

Less travel and admin for field workers

While the scheduling software has helped to improve our StreetCare service in the office, the mobile application has had the same effect in the field. The ability for users to receive their jobs directly to their mobile device, record notes and then have these automatically update office systems over the phone network, has led to significantly less travel to the depot, as well as reduced administration. They can also take photographs and GPS locations to be uploaded with the job information and even book follow-on tasks from their device. Supervisors and field workers genuinely enjoy using the technology as it removes many of the frustrations they had from paperwork.

But while the technology had been enormously successful, we were initially unsure how our field workforce would receive it. As Allan Wornes, our ICT Developer, says, "It was important that the mobile application would work both on and offline, and on a range of mobile devices from rugged Windows tablets to the latest android smartphones. But we were also aware that none of this mattered if the users didn't accept it.

"Advanced worked with us to provide a solution that fitted the business processes that we had across a large number of teams. They also developed the software to be intuitive, fast, easy to use and extremely stable. This meant the users were positive from the beginning. Getting the right device for the field workers is also not only important from a technology perspective, but also in achieving user acceptance. Giving field workers a good quality device is worth 100 hours of training. This showed our staff that we were investing in them and brought them onboard with what their managers wished to achieve."

Operational cost savings and improved service

As a result of implementing Job Manager, we have reduced manual planning, administration and travel. This frees up time for all staff to be more productive. As a result we spend over 95 per cent of our time carrying out core tasks, up from the previous 80-85 per cent. The efficiency improvements across office and front-line services have led to a:

> £500,000 reduction in annual operational costs (contributing to a £45 million saving in our overall transformation project)

> 36 per cent increase in the average number of daily jobs carried out by field workers (from 11 to 15)

> 57 per cent reduction in service response times (from seven days to three days)

More information

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