



demonstration project



City Services in operation

Building Partnerships in Cambridge drives performance improvements

Contractor:	Cambridge City Services
Client:	Cambridge City Council
Case Study Ref:	298
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Region:	East of England
Sector:	Local Government, Housing
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Themes:	Improving existing stock, design and customer satisfaction, integrated teams

With partnership and determination, impressive performance improvements are possible. The Cambridge City Council department responsible for the housing stock and decent homes programme have responsibility for around 7,500 properties, all of which are in a generally good state of repair. In 2001, a decision was taken to drive improvements in the performance of the Council's maintenance service. The key driver for change was to make the service more "lean and efficient".

This was to be facilitated through updates to the relevant contract documents and procedures and was to be achieved whilst maintaining customer satisfaction. This decision was taken following the success and lessons learned from an earlier Demonstration Project, the Whitefriars Sheltered Housing Refurbishment Project (Demonstration Project 1062), which focused on a single large refurbishment scheme.

Respect for People

The success of the whole initiative depended on working with people in a way that gained their trust, and ensured their support. Importantly, the primary part of this programme emphasised safety, with toolbox talks providing ongoing encouragement, thus cutting accidents. Further initiatives to drive safety improvements included toolboxes on wheels, which minimised lifting injuries and kept tools secure in people's homes. To add further emphasis to the safety culture, a suggestion box scheme operated, awarding £50 per idea and £25 for a near miss. Good ideas are identified regularly in this way.

Further efforts have been made to ensure that Cambridge City Services' operatives feel valued. One example of this is that they receive the same pay and sickness benefits as white-collar staff. The Council's target for sickness absence is 3.5% with City Services' current performance at 4.5%. Work is ongoing to improve the performance in this area.

A mature apprentice course has operated throughout the life of the contract. The course, operated in partnership with the local college, has attracted 22 entrants that have all seen the course through to completion.

This scheme has been aimed at existing staff that have shown a commitment to the Council. The aim is to give semi-skilled/unskilled Cambridge City Services operatives the opportunity to improve skill levels, and increase their potential earnings. It has also helped to retain trained staff. In the first year, staff attend college in their own time and remain in a substantive post, in the second year they transfer to the Building Services section and attend college in work time. Apprentices usually achieve NVQ Level 2 in bricklaying, carpentry, plumbing or electrics midway through year 3, and many have opted to continue training to NVQ Level 3.

Driving Performance Improvement

Brainstorming between all parties working on the contract identified a long list of possibilities for improvement. Following on from this, a management workshop was held to assess cost and ease of implementation, potential to drive improvement, and commitment required. This resulted in a shortlist of six initiatives to be taken forward. These are described in more detail overleaf.

Initiative 1 – Resident Involvement in the Maintenance Service

Tenant and leaseholder representatives now sit on the Housing Management Board and resident representatives are involved in all major decisions, including contractor selection. Tenant representatives also attended operational maintenance meetings.

Importantly, seven volunteer tenants, trained in safety and quality inspection, provided a valuable and very successful tenant validation service. The Council's insurers provided the training as a means of reducing risks as the resident inspector scheme fell within the remit of their own course. The volunteers also received site inductions, health and safety briefings from each of the main contractors, and were issued with PPE.

Initiative 2 – Vehicle Tracking

The decision to implement vehicle tracking was taken to provide protection after a series of vehicle thefts, and furthermore to implement protection for those working alone. A £12,000 annual fuel saving covered the up-front cost of the digital system and other considerable benefits to the AVLS system have been achieved, such as:

- Security for lone workers – a “panic fob” which is programmed to raise an alarm at base (monitored 24 hours)
- Reduced theft of and from vehicles
- The ability to identify a vehicle's location when responding to emergencies, enabling the nearest vehicle to be called and to respond. This facilitated better planning in emergencies and, to date, two stolen vehicles have been successfully tracked and intercepted by the police.

Prior to this system being put in place, Cambridge City Council worked with the unions to agree a protocol and ensure that the system would actually offer protection for staff. They also wanted to make sure that monitoring was not going to be used to “spy” on operatives. Overall there was a positive response from staff and, since the protocol has been put into place, there have been few reservations.

Initiative 3 – Working from Home

Vehicle tracking has provided a further advantage in allowing operators to work directly from home which, in turn, has provided additional benefits including the saving of considerable time, a decrease in fuel costs and a reduction in the need for parking and facilities provision at the depot. There have also been huge benefits in terms of welfare and job satisfaction. At present, no figures exist for the reductions in the cost of fuel but this is being comprehensively monitored in 2007 to gauge the savings accrued.

Initiative 4 – Just in Time Delivery

To back up working from home and minimise trips to the stores, all materials are now taken on a “just in time” basis, bundled and off-loaded

exactly where required. This has enabled operatives to maximise value adding time and has reduced time spent travelling. This has had a knock on effect of providing benefits in terms of environmental sustainability through a decrease in carbon emissions, while simultaneously removing the need for site storage and unsightly containers that attract vandals, theft and site handling damage.

For jobbing repairs each operative carries imprest stock. When they return to the depot for fuel or job information, imprest stock is renewed. If materials are not available, the operative contacts stores and there is an emergency delivery to site. For planned works, prior notification is given to stores, including a list of materials, delivery date and times. Stores deliver the required materials on the first morning on site.

Initiative 5 – Co-location

The contractor's management and depot requirements for the Building Partnerships programme have been located at the Cambridge City Council's depot for the life of the contract. More recently, the contractors working on the Council's Decent Homes programme and the client team also joined the existing operatives at the depot. Such co-location has ensured much better communication throughout the partnership, with the whole operation now working as a single entity.

Initiative 6 – “Paperless Cab”

One initiative has failed to materialise. The technology available to provide a ‘paperless cab’ of the complexity needed for Council business has simply not been achievable. However, the rapid progress in this technology makes regular re-appraisal essential. The Council is about to embark on a cost analysis of electronically delivering information to and from the vehicle and there are now a number of options that could meet the client's needs. The Council are also doing an analysis of data systems, and the choice of system will probably dictate the type of ‘paperless cab’ solution engaged.

Lessons learned

- Valuing staff has a positive impact on their productivity
- Getting staff to provide ideas for safety improvements can lead to a significant cut in accident rates and gives those delivering the work ‘ownership’ of the process. Over the life of the contract the number of accidents has fallen by 47%
- Early involvement of the whole team is essential for maximising the opportunities for finding potential improvements at the start of the project
- Early collaboration enables a clear definition of the objectives of the project to be set and allows the client to define success
- Co-location improves communication throughout the partnership ensuring better results.



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