

Coast & Country Housing

Transforming an in-house repairs service to deliver enhanced Customer Satisfaction at a significantly lower cost

The Organisation

Established in 2001, Coast & Country Housing (CCH) took over the ownership and management of 10,124 homes from Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council as part of a large-scale stock transfer in July 2002.

The Challenge

The CCH repairs service had stagnated, and efforts to improve the service and deliver value for money (VFM) had fallen short. A new way forward was needed.

With a clear vision to be the best in the sector and pursue their Journey to Excellence, the management team understood the service needed to develop an operation that was fit for purpose, aligned with the organisation's vision, and cost effective.

They also recognised that without understanding the existing position clearly, changes would be made based on 'perceptions' of what the key issues were – with differing views on the required course of action and priorities the likely outcome.

CCH took the decision to bring in independent experts.

Our Solution

Understanding the starting position

CCH commissioned Vantage Business Solutions (Vantage) to carry out a comprehensive review of its repairs service to understand the starting position, and project manage and support CCH in implementing the required changes.

Using objective and informed analysis of all operational data, Vantage identified and clearly pinpointed where the issues were within the service, what the constraints were, and the potential opportunities that could be realised.

Experience in evaluation

Throughout the project, Vantage drew on vast experience across both the housing and private sector – using techniques including 'lean', value stream mapping, and value added activity analysis – to evaluate the service in detail.

The Benefit



As a result of our long-term relationship with

Vantage, they have enabled us to transform what was a tired in-house DLO into an excellent customer-focused, efficient and commercial repairs service.

We have made savings in excess of £3m pa which has put us on a very firm foundation for the future. We now have the priorities, insight and capability to move forward. It was a journey we couldn't have made ourselves.



Iain Sim

Chief Executive
Coast & Country Housing



The team have embarked on a continuous improvement journey – with service improvements already happening.



Re-engineering services for customers

Re-designing existing supply chain arrangements resulted in more effective and efficient use of vehicle stocks, coupled with improved service level agreements

- Commercial practices and rates were re-negotiated, allowing CCH to take advantage of improved economies of scale and more competitive prices
- Appraising outsourcing of key internal services determined whether they offered VFM to customers. Some non-core services were outsourced as a result of these appraisals
- Developing new Service Standards – through effective engagement with customers and staff – enabled improved services to be delivered at a lower cost
- Removing waste created by duplication of activities and bureaucratic decision making – and replacing them with streamlined processes and automated practices – underpinned a new, more cost-effective team structure
- Implementing IT solutions removed inefficient paper-based systems that also 'sucked' resource into back-office operations. Operatives and supervisors were liberated using mobile IT solutions and back office resource was focused where it should be – on frontline services

The implementation project became the highest priority on the CCH business plan and engaged staff across all service areas. Not only did processes need re-engineering and activities re-defined, the team had to change the way they viewed service delivery and their understanding of VFM.

The Outcomes

A transformed, customer-focused service is now delivering improved customer satisfaction and service delivery for CCH.

The team have embarked on a continuous improvement journey, supported by an effective infrastructure to ensure they don't stand still. While new and improved ways of working are on the horizon, service improvements are already happening.

- **Customer satisfaction has increased from 78% to 93%**
- CCH are now delivering top quartile performance on targets and first-time fix ups
- **Savings in excess of £3m per annum** have been realised
- All loss-making services have been turned around – releasing cash for re-investment
- Productivity from pre-project levels has dramatically increased, while **employee satisfaction has risen from 61% to 83%**

About Vantage Business Solutions

Vantage Business Solutions is a consultancy firm specialising in helping organisations significantly improve their financial performance, enhance customer satisfaction and demonstrate Value for Money to stakeholders. What makes us different is that we provide all of our services on a performance-related basis – demonstrating our commitment by staking our own rewards on the success of our Client's transformation. We work closely with our clients to identify their priorities, eliminate their business constraints and achieve high performance.

Contact us today to see how we can improve the performance of your organisation.



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Transformation of housing management services delivers 20% savings and an increase in Customer Satisfaction

The Organisation

Established in 2001, Coast & Country Housing (CCH) took over the ownership and management of 10,124 homes from Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council as part of a large-scale stock transfer in July 2002.

The Challenge

The Housing Services Team were working hard to deliver high levels of performance in an environment of changing needs, ever increasing customer expectation levels and challenging financial conditions.

Set against a difficult financial climate it would have been sufficient for CCH simply to stay still, but their ambition to be the best in the sector demanded a radically new approach to value for money (VFM).

They sought Vantage Business Solutions' (Vantage's) expertise and independent assistance to challenge how they operated, assess VFM, pinpoint the issues, derive the opportunities, recommend solutions, and work with them to deliver the vision.

Our Solution

Understanding the status quo

Vantage used a rigorous approach and methodology to complete an objective and informed analysis of all housing services based upon data and evidence – not opinion. The scope for the project included customer contact, income collection, property lettings and estate management.

Business processes were mapped and analysed to identify inefficiencies and duplication of activities performed by staff, which were 'sucking' resource into back-office activities and away from frontline services.

Driving service value

The delivery of the new service is underpinned with a radical approach that focused on service value drivers. The 'one size fits all' approach that had led to resources focused in the wrong places was disbanded. Instead, processes and practices were designed to 'get it right first time'. Inefficiencies and duplication were identified, quantified, and designed out of the new processes.

The Benefit



 "The insights the project gave were remarkable. Vantage tapped into all available information and gave me a clear picture of the operation, the key challenges and a pathway to the operation needed." 

Ronny Harris

Assistant CEO
Coast & Country Housing



Now, if something does not add value to the customer it is not done. 

However, performance improvements were hindered by CCH's organisational structure. Vantage identified how the team structure was too bureaucratic, limiting the ability of staff to improve the operation, and diluted accountability and ownership, with too many people managing the same things.

Carrying out value-added assessments of staff activity and resource levels, Vantage designed a new team structure aligning to the new processes, empowering staff to make the right decision at the right time.

Shifting to a can-do approach

Vantage worked with the team collaboratively to shift existing mindsets and develop a "can do" approach. This led to the development of more cost effective service standards that are aligned with the vision and, importantly, not restricted by staff perceptions of constraints based on existing working practices. The concept of value added and VFM was inculcated within all staff.

Now, if something does not add value to the final customer it is not done.

The Outcomes

The operational transformation continues to deliver a greatly enhanced service that customers value, and at a significantly reduced cost.

A team now owns and drives forward the service. Systems changes have been successfully delivered that "go beyond" the existing sector norms, delivering an enhanced service. Resource is focused on service delivery. With robust back office systems and effective processes staff have been mobilised and are now out of the office, managing their neighbourhoods and working with tenants to improve the estates.

Ronny Harris, Assistant CEO, CCH, has identified key performance improvements across the board:

- The housing services operation now delivers more for less. Overall, **cost savings of £800,000 pa** have been achieved
- Rent arrears are now at 4.8% of rent due – down from 5.5% – and **income is up by over £400,000**
- **Staff sickness has reduced by over 2%** to 2.99% – amongst the top performing in the sector
- On its own, streamlining the sign-up process has **saved 5,000 hours** to spend on value added tasks
- Our 'first time fix' for customers is measured, enabling us to focus on performance improvement, and currently stands at **95.5%**

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Coast & Country Housing

Breakthrough in income collection through smarter ways of working and at a lower cost

The Organisation

Established in 2001, Coast & Country Housing (CCH) took over the ownership and management of 10,124 homes from Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council as part of a large-scale stock transfer in July 2002.

The Challenge

CCH recognised that despite a hard working and dedicated income collection team, arrears performance was in the lower quartile and showed no clear signs of improvement.

It was also difficult to determine whether the team were working smartly, or whether their activities were focused in the right areas.

A decision was taken to bring in independent experts to deliver a 'breakthrough' in income collection performance and ensure the service delivered value for money (VFM) for customers.

Our Solution

Understanding the income collection service

CCH commissioned Vantage Business Solutions (Vantage) to review the service as part of their four-year VFM partnership arrangement:

- Collection and analysis of all staff activity – identifying non value-added tasks and determining whether staff were 'playing in the right position'
- Extraction and analysis of data – identifying process adherence and quantifying whether completed actions impacted cash collection positively

Drawing on vast experience across both the housing and private sector, Vantage used proven tools and techniques including value driver mapping and advanced data analysis.

The review revealed CCH was spending significant resource complying with processes and actioning system-generated recommendations on each arrears case, without understanding clearly whether it was achieving desired outcomes.

The Benefit



"I am now delivering services in a way that has gone beyond my expectations. Where in the past we'd struggled to improve performance I now have a more motivated team, making the right decision at the right time and delivering higher performance levels at a lower cost. I'm confident I have a service delivering VFM."



Louise Harding

Tenancy Compliance Manager
Coast & Country Housing



The service was effectively re-built to give staff the right information to make the right decision at the right time.



And there were differences identified in staff perceptions of the appropriate action to take for arrears cases. This meant actions were inconsistent, leading to varying performance levels and undermining the actions CCH policies required in an arrears case.

Rebuilding a lean arrears approach

The service was effectively stripped back to basics and re-built on a methodology that focused on case risk, actions that delivered results and an operational infrastructure empowering staff – giving them the right information to make the right decision at the right time:

- Processes were aligned to deliver the new operational standards
- A clear and concise communications strategy was put in place to ensure customers understood their obligations and the actions CCH would take in dealing with unpaid rent
- The team structure was aligned to a staff empowerment model, eliminating the fragmentation of accountability and ownership the existing structure was fostering
- Arrears case management working practices now ensured information was recorded efficiently and effectively and was available to the right staff, eliminating duplication in information management and the levels of mis-information causing inconsistent service delivery
- The performance management framework was set up to focus on new KPIs that were linked reliably to collection results, delivering information for consistent, informed decision making. New targets were established and the format for performance review meetings was changed, moving away from perceptions of issues to focus on recorded data. This freed up additional time to work on problem resolution and deliver improvements

The Outcomes

Customers now knew what to expect, and CCH did what they stated they would do.

The income collection operation now delivers a consistent and effective service with empowered staff. Cost has been reduced and service levels significantly improved. While staff satisfaction levels are now higher too.

- Performance has improved during the year with **income collection up from 99.2% to 101.2%** – additional income of almost **£400,000** to date
- Arrears are at the **lowest point in seven years at 4.8% of rent due** and have moved into medium quartile for similar organisations
- There are less customers in arrears, and a renewed ability to increase benefits through effective use of resources

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