



Saving money across the business with ROCC



Implementing the right management controls makes good business sense and is critical to providing efficient front line services. Aster Property Management, the direct labour organisation of the Aster Group, did not previously have a requirement for job costing for repairs and maintenance. By upgrading to Uniclass Social Housing, Aster Property Management has tightened accounting procedures, improved efficiency and will save 10% in annual costs.

Aster Property Management is a fast-moving organisation providing services for 18,000 homes owned by Aster Group. Employing 220 people, it offers repairs, refurbishment, gas servicing, electrical inspections, plumbing and other services. Its main customers are Testway Housing, Sarsen Housing Association, Flourish Homes and Ridgeway Community Housing.

In 2005, Testway Housing implemented Uniclass Enterprise for job management, job invoicing and call centre support. Mobile workforce management and automated scheduling were later added. Testway Housing became part of the Aster Group and, within Aster Property Management, the system was soon handling more work.

"Uniclass Enterprise was a tool to report key performance indicators but it wasn't used to feed our finance system," said Aster Property Management's Head of Finance Sharon Simmonds. "A job would be raised in Uniclass but the purchase order would be raised separately in the finance system."

Finance staff struggled to complete monthly invoices and answer client queries. Their problems highlighted the lack of job costing with no schedule of rates, standard job descriptions or materials tracking.

Project Summary

When Aster Property Management wanted to implement full job costing and financial system integration for housing repairs, it turned to ROCC.

Uniclass Social Housing replaced Uniclass Enterprise, retaining familiar functionality while delivering powerful new features.

Thanks to ROCC's professional services, Aster Property Management has tightened its job accounting procedures, improved efficiency and will save 10% in annual costs.



Sharon Simmonds

Head of Finance, Aster Property Management

"You have got to have a system that's flexible and moves with the times - ROCC Uniclass Social Housing does just that. Our working relationship with ROCC is even stronger than before."

"Every cost we incurred was charged back to the client. They never had individual job costing but it was the best we could do. The clients were very unhappy."

Growing workload

By 2010, a greatly-increased workload meant job costing had to be introduced. The call centre takes 1,000 calls a week, mostly about repairs. Managers wanted to record full details for this work so that actual labour and materials costs were calculated.

"We wanted to improve performance, be in control of the budgets and be able to monitor what's going on," said Simmonds. "That meant enhancing the management controls and bringing the system up to full job costing."

A key objective was to link with the OpenAccounts finance system, enabling purchase orders to be raised in Uniclass. But no client would be invoiced until all costs were accounted for. Customer service would also be improved by giving clients read access to the system.

ROCC technology had already supported significant business growth. ROCC had gained an in-depth knowledge of the organisation making it the ideal partner to implement change. Upgrading to Uniclass Social Housing was the logical solution.

"We already had a strong working relationship with ROCC and the service they provided was really good," said Simmonds.

Professional approach

The six-month implementation project started in September 2010. Backed by PRINCE2 methodology, ROCC's consultants worked closely with in-house staff to transfer existing data. ROCC's professionalism, project understanding and commitment proved vital as replacement 'like-for-like' reports were created.

An interface to OpenAccounts was implemented and staff trained in the new functionality. After a successful weekend switchover, ROCC consultants remained on-site to answer queries.

"ROCC were excellent. We all worked really well as a team," said Simmonds. "Everything went live as planned."

Completed on time and budget, the system included schedules of rates for the top 200 jobs such as changing a tap washer. Operatives select activities on their mobile devices while subcontractors use the same list for consistency.



What the IT Department says...

"It was very much a partnership project. The project team had members of the ROCC team, Aster Property Management and Aster Group IT. ROCC approached the project from the point of view of working with us rather than telling us what was going to happen and when."

"Having worked with ROCC for six years, we think they've got a pretty strong product in Uniclass Social Housing."

Roy Thompson
IT Director, Aster Group

All materials are now subject to tight controls including annual contracts with builders' merchants that mandate the use of valid job numbers. All supplier invoices are raised against jobs, enabling Uniclass Social Housing to record actual expenditure.

Job costs are posted in real-time including labour, stores issues, direct purchases and sub-contractors. This provides total certainty when billing clients, something previously impossible. And following survey inspections, the system even helps give departing tenants accurate repair estimates for void properties.

Saving money

Uniclass Social Housing now covers response repairs, planned maintenance and estates work. The tighter management controls have given significant efficiency savings and cost reductions. Customers also enjoy read-only web access to query their job details, helping to increase satisfaction.

"You have a real audit trail on materials. It's so clear and so transparent now that everything interlinks," said Simmonds.

Thanks to the ability to track people and materials, labour and costs, client invoicing is wholly reliable. Business analysis identifies problem jobs, identifies the cost of delivering each job type and helps better target resources.

"I think we'll get our money back well within the first year. I reckon we'll make a 10% saving on costs. There's a lot of potential to save money across the whole business."

A new accounting system, SunAccounts, is now planned along with stock condition surveys using mobile devices. A more immediate objective is to implement a web information and application portal - the Uniclass Dashboard.

"This will help us to write our own simple reports thus enabling us to be more reactive to requirements from staff in supporting our customers," said Simmonds. "Uniclass Social Housing is just so strong, adaptable and easy to change."

About Aster Group

Aster is a thriving partnership providing homes and housing related services in central southern and south west England. Group companies have assets exceeding £570 million, annual turnover of over £81 million and between them employ around 1000 people. The operating companies own and manage over 17,100 homes and provide services to more than 40,000 customers.