

## Surrey Heath Borough Council revolutionise property inspections process with Aspire

Surrey Heath Borough Council is responsible for the collection of tax across approximately 36,600 domestic dwellings and 2,600 business properties. Currently in the midst of a five-year strategy one of their key themes focuses on 'Performance' with the goal of delivering effective and efficient services better and faster. As part of this process the Revenue and Benefits team have been reviewing technology solutions designed to save resource and reduce costs whilst boosting reserves so that the Council can redistribute funding back into much needed public services.

### Moving from a paper-based to workflow approach

Property Inspections was identified as an area which could benefit from automation and a more structured workflow approach. Prior to the roll out of Destin Solutions' Aspire Property Inspection technology, a paper-based system was used to track new property developments and manage the process of inspections. This was combined with using a third party to conduct reviews and field customer enquiries, delivering a less personalised and more administrative orientated service.

Following the roll out of the Aspire Property Inspection module Surrey Heath Borough Council have been able to bring their empty property reviews back in-house, where they have all the relevant, up-to-date information on hand, available electronically and the local knowledge to support customer enquiries.

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Ellie Hawkins,  
Revenues Team Leader,  
Surrey Heath Borough Council.

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Ellie Hawkins, Revenues Team Leader at Surrey Heath comments *“Aspire Property Inspection has proven to be a useful time management tool, we can easily check where inspections have most recently been carried out, where next inspections are planned and as a reference tool for customer enquiries. The reporting features are also very useful with a monthly report which flags empty properties approaching 180 days, so that they can be queued up as part of the next set of inspections carried out.”*

### Visual and trackable evidence relating to Inspections

Ellie also notes *“the photo functionality is also a great feature, enabling us to electronically view and track progress on new property developments as well as providing a visual historical record, outlining what happened in the lead up to a decision being made following an inspection. We effectively have a documented catalogue of events that supports what happened, which we have secure, instant access to, either from the office or out in the field. We have been able to expand our relationship with the Valuation Office providing photographic evidence to back up the decisions we make.”*

The technology also enabled a new Revenues Officer to step in and cover the role of inspections, having no previous inspections experience or familiarity with new developments.





It enabled them to hit the ground running with all information instantly accessible and very little in the way of systems training required.

### **Instant access to management information**

Prior to the implementation of Aspire, Surrey Heath had no readily accessible management information to report back on, now they are able to report that anywhere between 50 and 100 property inspections are carried out a week and what the status or outcome of those inspections were.



Ellie goes on to say *“Aspire has ensured we can more accurately issue completion notices to the right person at the right time. It also enables us to conduct reviews on some of the more obscure discounts and exemptions to make sure they are still valid. It makes the process more fluid and gives our Inspector more time to focus on the task at hand and conduct ad-hoc reviews on specific groups of properties.”*

With daily data updates taken from the revenues and benefits team, planning department and building control and loaded into Aspire, Surrey Heath can accurately report on the number of completion notices issued in a given period. A number of statistics and reports can be provided instantly to senior management teams, providing more visibility and transparency backed up by solid evidence of the work conducted. The solution is also fully compliant with latest data protection regulations and information is securely processed in line with the General Data Protection Regulation.

### **Solution customisation by people who understand Revenues processes**

Ellie comments *“We have worked with Destin Solutions on an ongoing basis to customise the Aspire solution to meet our unique requirements, tweaking visual aspects and adapting the solution so that it will work better for us.*

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### **Handling new property developments**

Implementing the Aspire Property Inspection module has also saved the Council much time and resource by automating the process of adding over 300 new property developments and corresponding information into the system. Previously this would have been a labour-intensive manual task. The ability to now have an instant view of new developments means Surrey Heath can easily monitor what stage of the build a development is at and whether an inspection visit needs to be brought forward. Dealing with new property developments used to take up a lot of time and resource, now with the set up of watchlists and automated tracking and flagging tools, the team have more time to focus on new areas.

Following the success of the Aspire implementation Surrey Heath have also invested in Destin Solutions HUB - the small business rates relief fraud solution. Further demonstrating their commitment to deliver better service, they are already starting to see a significant return on investment and can verify new small business applications for relief as they come through.