

Preston and Lancaster Shared Service drive innovation with property inspection and data analytics technology

Preston and Lancaster Shared Service have been operating for over 5 years and have achieved combined savings to date of over £3M within the Revenues and Benefits department.

With an ongoing commitment to driving efficiencies and reducing costs further within the Shared Service they have invested in a Property Inspection module, commissioned an Empty Property Review and implemented a sophisticated data analytics and management tool for reporting.

Aspire Property Inspection module

Following an audit in 2013 a more effective solution for monitoring and managing property inspections was required. Prior to that implementation Preston and Lancaster Inspectors had to physically collect property inspection sheets and return them back to the office for scanning, indexing and inputting into their Academy system. They also had to maintain a manual filing system for new property developments and any reports were reliant on having advanced IT support to extract relevant data.

Destin Solutions were appointed to develop Aspire, an automated Property Inspection module. Following its implementation Inspectors at Preston and Lancaster now record all property inspection details online whilst onsite,



capturing all relevant information immediately. With an emphasis on workflow, once visits are completed Aspire works out what needs to be done next based on how the online form was completed and Inspectors can automatically schedule revisits to properties at any point in the future.

Property Inspectors have more control of their workload and accountability of their time, determining where they go based on more informed data and taking a more targeted approach to visits. Less administration is required and all information is accessible from handheld tablets.

New property developments

Aspire also records and monitors new property developments. This has saved staff time on manually tracking progress, giving Managers the information they need to report on and a better indication of what new properties are likely to come into taxation.

Julie Smethurst, Revenues Manager at Preston and Lancaster Shared Service comments “the more information we record in the system over time, the better we can forecast how quickly new property developments can become taxable. We are also using the intelligence we gather to predict at what stages we should be visiting other new developments and typically how long the developments are taking to progress.”

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VISION – Empty Property Review service

Preston and Lancaster also chose to invest in the VISION Empty Property Review service sending a list of all empty properties to Equifax for data matching and analysis.

Over thirty different credit checks were carried out and Aspire applied logic stating that if a certain number of outcomes are true, the likelihood that these properties are now occupied and therefore taxable, is much higher.

This provided a more targeted approach to inspections and generated in excess of £15,000 in additional annual revenue on top of an enhanced New Homes Bonus.

VISION – management information portal

The final stage of the project saw Preston and Lancaster Shared Service invest in VISION, a web based business intelligence tool for analysing and reporting on their data. Taking extracts from their council tax, housing benefit, business rates, sundry debt and benefit overpayments systems it provides them with reports they can drill down into for further analysis.

A number of these reports took data held within their Aspire Property Inspection module enabling Managers to report on areas like all properties in development likely to become taxable in the next quarter. It also helped them keep track of what properties have been inspected and the number of visits carried out over specific time frames, providing more visibility of productivity than ever before.

Reports can also be run to view all properties which have been empty for six months and which can start to be taxed again at 100%. They also have the ability to extract a full list of properties currently listed as exempt from paying Council Tax and can sort them based on any one of the 23 reasons applied, putting a total cost against these exemptions.

Over 60 different reports have been created on properties, council tax, business rates and debt profiles. These reports have led to greater transparency and easier access to higher level details on caseload as well as better identification of where debt sits unresolved. Ultimately this has led to increased collection figures and supports more informed decision making within the Shared Service.

A suite of debt management reports has also been created for the Housing Benefits Overpayments team, these include largest balances, age debt analysis, age of debtor and

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balances by year and location. These have been created to assist the team with their workload and provides scope in the future for departments to work together to use these reports to proactively target debtors through visits.

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ABOUT DESTIN SOLUTIONS

Destin Solutions specialise in developing technology that supports Local Authorities and other Public Sector organisations in their aim to improve performance whilst maximising efficiencies and minimising costs.

The company's expertise include; business intelligence applications, debt reporting and analytics, performance management dashboards, development of online procedure manuals and following consultation, the delivery of workflow applications designed to meet compliance adherence needs and ensure processes are bullet-proof.