



# Case Study



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Jim Moffett, Policy and Monitoring Manager in Health, Housing and Adult Services, Sunderland City Council



Sunderland Civic Centre

## Civica enables Sunderland City Council to further help homeless people

Sunderland City Council Housing Services has improved the way it helps and monitors local homeless people and monitors those at risk of becoming homeless by implementing a new software-based casework management and reporting system.

The breakthrough has been achieved using a new automated Workflow and Electronic Document Management (EDM) reporting platform called Housing Options & Homelessness from Civica, a market leader in software-based solutions that help organisations improve service delivery and efficiency.

The new system gives Sunderland City Council's Housing Options advisers, and managers, better visibility of the cases they handle, more time to review individual cases and their administrative processes and automates case management processes. It has also helped the department deal with revised national statistics in 2008, as well as recording extra information about potentially homeless households for local use.

This innovation in homeless reporting helped in the development of Sunderland City Council's Homelessness Strategy for 2006-11. The council's focus is increasingly on preventing homelessness

and carefully targeting local resources to those most in need. The strategy aims to manage down levels of homelessness and reduce the council's use of bed and breakfast accommodation.

With around 2,000 potentially homeless local people to assess every year and with a new Government Homelessness strategy overseeing this policy area, Sunderland set up an entirely new directorate - Health, Housing and Adult Services - to improve its service delivery. Its housing department was therefore re-organised to include 11 housing options advisers, eight of whom were full-time.

As well as providing support from its main office in Sunderland, the Housing Service holds local surgeries in Houghton and Washington, and makes home visits where appropriate. Staff give citizens housing advice and carry out homeless assessments. They also provide practical help to help people get suitable housing or support in their own homes.

Government guidelines define a series of different measures around homelessness including rough sleeping, temporary accommodation, bed and breakfast accommodation used for families or 16/17 year olds, hostels and "homeless acceptances" – people who have been accepted with a full duty to rehouse - the best known national measure of homelessness.

**Sunderland City Council currently benefits from using the following Civica solutions**



Workflow & Doc. Management



Contact Management



Revenues & Benefits



Housing



Environment



Traffic & Streets



Planning



Finance



Legal



Pensions



Health & Social Care



Education & Skills



Managed Services



Consulting



Software Licensing



Voice Solutions



Internet Solutions



Fleet Management



Service Management

Jim Moffett, policy and monitoring manager in Health, Housing and Adult Services at Sunderland City Council said: *"We provide advice and support to help prevent homelessness. This applies to all different ages and family types and often includes vulnerable younger age groups. We have a statutory duty of care to homeless people or those threatened with homelessness within 28 days. If our advisers cannot help prevent homelessness, we will look at statutory assessment. If they qualify, we will house them. If not we will continue to try and help prevent – or relieve – their homelessness."*

Under Government's central strategy, Sunderland's housing team was also tasked with hitting annual performance targets including:

- Minimising the use of bed and breakfast for homeless households: bringing it below an average of 6.25 in 2008-09; then below five in 2009-10
- Keep temporary accommodation placements below 15 households in 2008-09 and 14 in 2009-10
- Increasing the number of homeless cases prevented by 251 to 621 in 2008-09
- Reducing homeless acceptances: by 23 households to 410 in 2008/9, and 390 in 2009/10
- Keeping rough sleeping below an average of one person per night
- Improve service quality through staff training, process review and maintaining customer satisfaction

In addition, changing national reporting needs have added to housing advisers' administrative workload. Although the Government reduced the number of National Indicators in 2007/08 to simplify reporting, it also introduced additional reporting on prevention actions which required new data inputs. Changing the Civica system to record this was a simple matter.

When Sunderland tendered for a new homeless and advice system, Civica's Local Government Division won the tender because its Housing Options & Homelessness had Electronic Document management (EDM) and Workflow capabilities which provides a complete process for simplifying complex case management.

The Civica solution covers housing advice, homeless prevention and assessment in one end-to-end workflow process. In addition, the software also captures data for management reports, quarterly statistical returns for Government and the new National Indicator data for central government. The implementation was carried out by Civica consultants in conjunction with housing services IT team and completed in June 2007.

Civica's Housing Options & Homelessness solution now helps staff deliver consistently efficient and effective services responding faster to changing local needs. Staff can record and track allocation of temporary accommodation. They can also better research any previous homelessness.

The new software automatically generates electronic case files and its workflow processes are aligned to homelessness eligibility assessments. Team workloads can be better managed and new requests for help can be assessed faster. In addition, housing options managers can gain a quicker "snapshot" of staff's caseload and detailed audit trails as needed.

Jim Moffett said: *"Civica allow managers to easily find and look at case details – for example to respond to a query about a case - while staff can continue to work on the same case simultaneously."* With electronic case forms and decision-making capabilities in the system, we can pull out information when we need it. Decisions and letters are held on the system too, so we can respond to different requests which typically come from councillors, MPs or the press." He added: *"Civica's new software is useful because records management and monitoring is complicated. There are five core decisions, but 60 or more potential types of letters that we send – all with templates within the system. Despite the new targets and reporting requirement, we can share case information faster and better now."*

The Civica solution is helping the Sunderland team to develop best practice. Jim Moffett added: *"Housing options teams can record things they want. Because we're preventing more homelessness, we can now build in questions to find out why people were threatened with being homeless in the first place and what their needs are, even if they no longer show in homeless acceptance statistics. This helps us to refine and better target the services we provide in the future with the ultimate aim of trying to eradicate homelessness in Sunderland."*

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