

NEWS

IT'S THE VERY LATEST

GLAMORGAN & GWENT HOUSING ASSOCIATION SELECT OMNILEDGER

Background

Glamorgan and Gwent Housing Association was established in 1977 with the aim of providing high quality housing to those in need in South East Wales. In total the Association owns 3,400 properties, including six sheltered and one extra care scheme for older people. The Association's vision is to make a contribution to communities so that they are places where people choose to live. Its purpose is to work with others to offer housing solutions and services that make a positive difference to people's lives.

The Association is a non-profit making organization and is registered with the National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Federation of Housing Associations. A voluntary Board oversees the Association, with the day-to-day activities being carried out by 80 full and part time members of staff. Glamorgan and Gwent have recently completed a successful extra care scheme in partnership with Newport City Council. "We feel that the expertise gained can be used to work in partnership with other Local Authorities to set up similar schemes", says Graham Shellard, IT Manager at Glamorgan and Gwent Housing Association.

The Issue

For a number of years the Association's business activities have been served by a number of systems, which have through time, led to operational inefficiencies. Therefore, in order for the association to move forward a decision was made to migrate to an on-line fully integrated system. "Essentially we were operating with separate housing, maintenance, rents and finance systems", comments Graham Shellard. "We decided to carry out a desktop review of all the solutions in the market and created a shortlist. We then sent a detailed questionnaire to each of the suppliers and evaluated the results. This produced a new refined shortlist of suppliers that could offer us a suitable solution. We then arranged site visits to users of these products to enable us to see the products operating in an everyday working environment."

The Solution

"From the outset OmniLedger came across as a very professional, customer focused company and were the only supplier recommended without reservation by a neighbouring association. OmniLedger's Sales Team also approached the demonstration differently they wanted to identify our needs and illustrate how their Pyramid system could meet them, rather than just trying to sell us a system. More importantly they answered all our questions with complete honesty"

Pyramid was easy to use from first viewing and staff at the sites we visited commented on how intuitive the system was and that little training was needed. We also telephoned a number of other current users, who unreservedly praised both the product and the company.

From the very first meeting with OmniLedger we felt very comfortable with the company, staff and system," said Graham Shellard. "We decided to visit two existing customers to ensure we received a wide range of views on OmniLedger's support, training, and the functionality available within the product." Having completed the selection process Glamorgan & Gwent had no reservations about OmniLedger or the Pyramid system. In December 2002 they signed a contract with OmniLedger to provide an eighty-client system for the entire suite of application software. The final solution also incorporated a number of remote offices that access the system via a Virtual Private Network (VPN). With the decision made all that remained was for the system to be installed, existing data transferred and users trained ready to go live on 1st April 2003, just three months after signing the contract.

The Implementation

The implementation process started with a number of project management meetings, which involved key members from each department and the relevant OmniLedger personnel. A timescale was mutually agreed and adhered to. "We ran the rent systems in parallel from Mid February to mid April, Finance for March and April, and Maintenance during the month of May. Where a delay occurred in one of our departments OmniLedger were helpful in both re-scheduling the training and the data upload", comments Graham Shellard. Glamorgan & Gwent successfully went live on the 1st April as scheduled.

Training was a key factor in the implementation process and was completed by Kevin Sander of OmniLedger. Graham went on to say "all members of staff praised the trainer very highly.

He was able to vary the pace of training to ensure that all users stayed attentive throughout the sessions. He also made himself available outside the standard training sessions to provide one-to-one coaching for those who required it." "User notes and handouts are of a very high standard, and very simple to use.

We feel confident that when we take on new members of staff they will be able to use Pyramid by reference to the user notes and with a little training from current members of staff."

The Housing Department

The Housing Managers have also noticed efficiencies, states Jan Chapman, "OmniLedger's Pyramid system has impacted on Housing staff significantly by enabling them to have tenant and applicant details at their fingertips. The innovative Applicant Register, written for us, has made it possible to manage both our points and choice based systems simultaneously and to enable us to use the time saved more productively in giving advice and assistance to our customers."

In Conclusion

In conclusion Graham summed things up "We have experience of two housing systems in addition to OmniLedger's Pyramid system and have found Pyramid the simplest to use, the most integrated and have found the company to be the most responsive to our needs and changing requirements. We have no regrets about buying the Pyramid system." Staff are happier using Pyramid, as it is simpler to use than any of the previous systems. We no longer spend time reconciling the output from various systems and we are gaining operational efficiencies as information only needs to be input once." We are able to process rents and receipts very quickly and produce high quality rent statements on request. All staff are able to monitor their arrears at a time to suit them and offer support to tenants who may be getting into difficulties.

Continuing Development

Glamorgan and Gwent are now implementing a reward scheme for their tenants and OmniLedger have written the software to enable them to administer this within a tight deadline.

