

1st Touch Supports Halton Housing's Digital First Strategy With Mobile Software And A New Customer Self Service App

Submitted by: 1st Touch
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As part of its Digital First Strategy Halton Housing introduced 1st Touch (www.1sttouch.com) mobile software and worked closely with them on developing a ground-breaking customer app.

Halton Housing Trust is a forward thinking and dynamic not-for-profit housing association that owns and manages over 6,400 homes with over 16,000 customers in the Cheshire towns of Runcorn and Widnes. The Trust employs over 280 talented members of staff, including 80 specialist trades people in the Construction Services team. Halton's Board works closely with its executive management team to ensure the Trust's Strategic Aim of 'Improving People's Lives' is achieved.

By constantly reviewing the services it provides and with the advent of welfare reform and in particular Universal Credit, Halton knew that it needed to make a number of changes to ensure the best possible support for its customers during these challenging times. One area it identified was the need to exploit the potential of digital technology to support the delivery of services.

This led to launch of Halton's Digital First strategy and mobile technology was an important element of this. Halton chose 1st Touch as their mobile technology provider. Originally this was to support Halton's responsive repairs operation as it integrates closely with Halton's Aareon QL Housing Management system. The installation went smoothly and Halton built an excellent working relationship with 1st Touch. The integration between Aareon QL and 1st Touch proved to be a real strongpoint of the technology as the two systems are talking to each other so information is constantly being updated in real time.

This proved popular with the responsive repairs Maintenance Technicians too. They no longer need to return to base as frequently, as their jobs are sent directly to their mobile devices – which is much more efficient from a time perspective. It is also well suited to rural areas with a poor phone signal as the system's Smart Airtime feature sends encrypted information in small bursts when there is a signal. This allows the maintenance technicians to work offline, which is a major benefit. Many of the other solutions Halton had looked at did not have these features and so this was another driver behind choosing 1st Touch.

All of these factors combined with the initial experiences of 1st Touch mobile technology for its repairs operation gave Halton confidence to move to the next stage of their digital journey - rolling the technology out across the remainder of the Trust using the enterprise (http://www.1sttouch.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=16&Itemid=10) arrangements in place with 1st Touch.

As Carole Galsworthy Director of ICT & Business Improvement at Halton Housing Trust explains, "In addition to our responsive repairs team, we extended 1st Touch mobile working to our Arrears Management team, Neighbourhood Team, Tenancy Support and our ASBO officers. In all there are currently over 50 mobile users with more to follow as we add other service areas."

Another key aim of Halton's Digital First programme is to have 90% of customers accessing services online by 2018. To do this, Halton decided to go further and build an effective Customer App that covered all the main services that the Trust delivers. It needed to be able to update information in real time both for customers and in the Trust's back office systems. With such a strong relationship, Halton decided to work closely with 1st Touch to develop a ground-breaking Customer Self-Service App (<http://www.1sttouch.com/solutions/social-housing/self-service-app.html>) the first phase of which is now complete. The app is available 24/7/ 365 and customers can access it via their mobile devices; both smart phones and tablets across all platforms. This allows customers to action requests themselves through this self-service portal using the technology that they are familiar with whenever it is convenient for them.

With the App in place, customers can contact Halton about a wide range of services. For example, they can request a repair, report anti-social behaviour or estate issues such as graffiti or fly tipping and it allows them to send in related photographs too. They can order a gas service or gas repair or report a gas leak. They can also request a move or transfer and much more. If they need to check their rent balance or to make a payment, this is also now possible, via the App.

Carole Galsworthy continues, "Our Customer Self-Service App contains a tremendous amount of information and all the forms that customers might need to use. Customers simply enter the relevant information and the system logs a contact in our CRM system and kicks off the appropriate workflow to the relevant person and confirms to the customer that their query is being dealt with. The App is very thorough and this has all been made possible by the functionality of 1st Touch. Our customers now have a tremendous 24/7/365 resource on hand and we expect that it will have a huge impact on them and the Trust.

"One of the main benefits of 1st Touch is that all the information entered by customers is automatically updated in QL in real time. This level of delivery and seamless integration with QL is a real plus."

The main aim of introducing the Customer App and other aspects of the Digital First strategy is to ensure that the Welfare Reform changes and particularly the introduction of Universal Credit will have a net nil impact on the Trust in terms of costs and resources. The self-service App allows Halton to free up significant resources that can be re-directed and re-focused to delivering additional support to its most vulnerable customers. One way of understanding and quantifying the significance of this is to look at the cost of transactions.

Every call with a customer has a transactional cost of approximately £4 whereas every face-to-face meeting has a transaction cost of approximately £14. Typically, Halton has 170,000 transactions a year, so ultimately this will represent a potentially significant saving, where resources can be freed up & re-focused to other areas of the business.

Carole Galsworthy continues, "Our Digital First Programme had a number of key objectives.... but it was a blank piece of paper in terms of designing a Customer App. 1st Touch helped us to design and build this and it is a first rate system that will not only transform what we do but will also add a whole new positive dimension to the customer experience we deliver. 1st Touch took the time to listen and understand what we needed and worked with us on delivering a highly effective solution which is all the

more impressive because of the real time integration to QL and the automation of CRM contacts and colleague workflows. There's no doubt that there are a number of things we just couldn't have achieved without 1st Touch and being able to work with them on developing this App and the other modules has been a great opportunity and proof of a great partnership. "

Halton Housing's use of Enterprise Mobile Technology and its Customer Self-Service App are visible on two videos here: <http://bit.ly/WJcbDZ>

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Note to Editors: About 1st Touch (www.1sttouch.com)

Southampton based 1st Touch, a subsidiary of Aareon AG (www.aareon.com), has enabled dozens of field workforce-based organisations to embrace new mobile technologies and so achieve significant savings, greater productivity and more cost-effective use of resources. 1st Touch Mobile delivers clear and unique benefits: These include the system's acclaimed 'Smart Airtime' feature where 'airtime' is minimised and the system is always available with or without 'airtime'. The system's flexibility through simple customer control over forms creation and amendment is also widely acclaimed. There is Integration to multiple back office and other enterprise software applications, so that data is entered only once.

With its widely acclaimed mobile technology, 1st Touch has a clear focus on the Social Housing and Local Government markets. Many social housing providers and local authorities, at large, now benefit from the fast and tangible, best of breed benefits that 1st Touch mobile technology delivers to the enterprise.

To date, over 50% of the social housing market, which has deployed mobile technology, has chosen to implement 1st Touch. In local government, 1st Touch has already been adopted for a wide range of mobile workforce uses. Ready to use applications for local authority organisations include: Public Buildings, Highways/Street Services, Environmental/Waste Management, Revenues and Benefits, together with Planning Control and Trading Standards.

1st Touch software is available on a wide variety of platforms including: Windows Mobile, Apple and Android.

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