

NI14 - Service Improvement Programme

Housing Services



With a population of 270,000 and more than 55,000 tenanted properties, of which 10,000 are leasehold, the London Borough of Southwark is the largest social landlord in London and one of the largest in the country. This generates more than 150,000 housing repairs each year.

As a beacon authority, focused on continual improvement, Southwark's efforts have already been recognised with the receipt of The National Housing Award in 2008 for its radical approach to Housing Repairs Management.



The introduction of National Indicator 14 (NI14) has focused Local Authorities throughout the country on the nature of each interaction that they have with their customers, openly challenging the value of each contact to the service being provided.

This indicator was never intended to be a statistical overhead, but as a catalyst within authorities to highlight areas where processes could be improved to reduce customer frustration and increase service efficiency and effectiveness.

A number of Authorities who have embraced this initiative from the outset are already citing tangible improvements in frontline staff morale as a result.

■ NI 14 – 2009 Submission

The initial challenge facing all Local Authorities was to come up with a definition of which contacts added true value to the customer experience and which could have been avoided. To support this Southwark took an active part in

the definition by participating in the NI 14 Contact Council.

Like many Local authorities Southwark chose initially to focus their NI14 count on the statistics collected via their CRM system and the customer interaction with front-end call centre.

However, having collected and collated information in this way it was clear that this was only considering one aspect of customer interaction and confidence in the initial figure of 16% was low.

Southwark therefore approached Aiimi to help them develop and implement an alternative, more comprehensive approach.

■ NI 14 – the New Approach

With the underlying purpose of NI14 in mind Southwark, in partnership with Aiimi, embarked upon a radical and complementary analysis strategy.

Rather than focussing purely on the contact centre, it was decided to review the life-cycle of contacts

relating to a particular service request, including involvement with all of the internal service functions as well as external delivery partners.

By focussing on the processes end to end, the overall service could be challenged and improved and inevitably unnecessary contacts reduced.

■ Housing Repairs Focus

Housing Repairs was selected as the initial target Service Area for this work.

This was selected for two reasons: firstly it was one of Southwark's initial submission areas (22% avoidable contact reported); and secondly housing repairs is the source of the highest number of complaints, a true indicator of an avoidable contact in its own right.

Within Housing Repairs the areas of Roofs, Leaks and Water Penetration were selected for specific end to end analysis.

The approach adopted was to work backwards from complaints, and conduct a forensic analysis of

a representative sample of cases, identifying the various contact points within the lifecycle of the repair. In turn this would create the basis for an objective cost and count analysis.

“This approach has given us a really valuable insight into our current processes and provided the level of detail necessary to justify change. This is now a key component of our ongoing improvement programme.”

Dominic Cain
Head of Customer Services

The target sample included cases that had reached Stages 1, 2, 3 and LGO and was counterbalanced by onsite observation of calls within the call centre and the management of contractors by the middle office functions.

Over a period of 8 weeks, detailed process mapping took place identifying the various parties and contact points both externally with the customer and internally between the various Southwark functions.

As part of this, all systems used within the processes were reviewed to assess what information was being captured and how this was subsequently being used.

■ The Count and Cost

Drawing together input from the breadth of the process, the team was able to build a cost and count model, providing Southwark with

a detailed view of avoidable contact and the cost implications of the process from end to end.

Complaints Analysis

£2.3 million spent on avoidable contacts per year

41,000 avoidable contacts due to complaints alone

Avoidable contact within Housing Repairs Complaints: 76%

With identified avoidable contact levels across the whole of the Housing Repairs function exceeding 50%, this exercise confirmed the council’s original fears that the early submission had under called the levels of actual end to end contact that could be avoided. It also highlighted potential financial savings in excess of £2m that could be achieved with key service improvements.

This work has now led to a completely revised approach to NI14 data capture for the 2010 submission, combining contacts from all aspects of the repair cycle, to provide a truly representative picture of the customer experience.

■ Continual Improvement

As well as focussing on the external contact, this new approach allows Southwark to identify and monitor the levels of internal departmental interaction, helping the service as a whole to

focus on ongoing process and service improvement.

As well as introducing a number of tactical changes identified, Southwark are now undertaking a strategic review of the way in which information relating to a customer and a property can be shared more effectively between the various Services.

■ Further Service Areas

The value of this exercise is widely recognized within the council and as a result a further project has been initiated in Estates Parking, with the intention of embedding the tools and techniques used within the Council’s ongoing Service Improvement initiatives.

For more information on this project and other local government projects or initiatives, please contact:

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