

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE: WEDNESDAY, 23 JANUARY 2013

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

SUBJECT: PDA AND CAPITA UPDATE

1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.01 This report will update members on the current status of mobile working in Housing Services.

2.00 BACKGROUND

2.01 There have been a number of issues with the implementation of mobile working in the Asset Management service. These are as follows.

2.02 Issues were raised regarding signal issues in July 2011 as part of training. In order to resolve this, a range of options were considered. In order to test the mobile network provider alternative SIM cards were procured. The same issue existed and so it was clear that the issue was not with the network (corporate suppliers). A specialist supplier was engaged to make an assessment of the issues and try and identify cause and solutions. No device specific issues were identified and at this point, they engaged with the PDA suppliers, who confirmed that no hardware error could be found. The corporate mobile device management software (Mobi Control) was removed from the device and this also made no difference. Activity reports were run against a number of devices where issues were being experienced.

2.03 During the period January to March 2012 it became apparent that the software was 'freezing' on the device which meant the device had to be closed down and restarted. This was reported back to the software suppliers who acknowledged this as a known fault. They indicated it had been resolved and that the fix would be available in Version 10 of the software which should be available from April 2012.

2.04 Despite assurances that voice and data should happily co-reside and should not cause problems, there continued to be issues. A device was sent to the software supplier for further investigation and we also bought an alternative make/model of device to finally eliminate concerns in the workforce that the device selection was the issue. The

same issue occurred on the alternative device which eliminated the PDA as the cause of the problem. A PDA was again sent to our device suppliers who spent considerable time at no cost in trying to replicate and eliminate the issue. A device was also sent to the software supplier who, were able to replicate the issue at their site which eliminated any local infrastructure set up at Flintshire.

- 2.05 Whilst all of the technical information from suppliers indicated that data and voice should be able to co reside on the device with no detrimental effect it was suggested by council officers, that we trial separate phone and mobile devices with a group of operatives and assess results. A decision was made to procure separate mobile phones for 30 operatives and trial this for a period of time. If it were to be successful, the net additional cost to the project would be £1800 per annum for 75 operatives. The phones were ordered mid July 2012.
- 2.06 Version 10 of Open Housing was installed in the test system week beginning 26th July 2012. This represented a major release as it included enhancements to a range of modules as well as the potential fix for Open Mobile. Some faults were found and additional fixes were received. Version 10 went fully live in October 2012.
- 2.07 Some issues are still being experienced though less frequent, where operatives have "no comms" in a good signal area. For example two operatives will be in the same area, one device will have communications and the other device will not. The operatives then have to come back into the office for the issue to be investigated. This has been reported to the software supplier and the last time this happened the technical support as the supplier indicated a need to increase the number of 'agents' against the Open Mobile module application server to 15. This was done but it does not appear to have eliminated the problem and we have recently asked the software supplier to consider if this figure needs to be increased again. An employee from the software supplier has been on site to investigate and has recommended that Flintshire consider replacing the current port forwarding solution with the Corporate VPN via Cisco. By implementing this solution Flintshire would have direct access to the LAN potentially eradicating connection issues.

3.00 CONSIDERATIONS

Current Position

- 3.01 To date, over 7000 jobs have been issued and completed using mobile devices. This will continue to be monitored
- 3.02 Version 10 has been installed and is operational. It has been confirmed following a time of live use that this has eradicated the:

- problem of devices freezing as they attempt to download jobs.
- Problems still exist with data and voice being used together but those using a separate mobile phone, (although inconvenient) are able to work effectively.
- Resolution will not mean that there will never be any issues as with any mobile device there will on occasion be problems with downloading large files when the network is busy etc.

- 3.03 Recent evidence has been produced from two further sites with issues with mobile working- one had similar voice/data issues as Flintshire though on a different device and rather than pursue it with the software supplier bought separate mobile phones. A further organisation has been using Open Mobile successfully on a HTC device for a number of years, they have recently upgraded to a similar device to Flintshire and have started to experience issues with data and voice (not the same direct issue as Flintshire). This company has contacted the PDA supplier who advised them that the Open Mobile software could be setting the priority of data greater than voice, testing is currently being carried out by this council. This has been raised with Capita and they have advised that the issues being experienced by Flintshire and another council are not the same issue. The software supplier has since advised that Flintshire are experiencing the telephone issue because the device being used is not 3G although this was not stated in the original specification that they provided.
- 3.04 Monthly meetings have been taking place between Flintshire Housing and IT representatives and the software supplier in order to discuss and review the outstanding issues with mobile working implementation. The supplier has agreed to dedicate technical resource to work with the PDA supplier to investigate any issues between software and devices.
- 3.05 Flintshire has been very assertive with the software supplier in these meetings as issues have been hindering implementation for an unsatisfactory time now. Flintshire has followed all specifications provided by the supplier and also attempted all resolutions that have been suggested. Flintshire staff involved with the engagement with the software supplier have made it clear that if any reinvestment in equipment is required over and above that which would be expected due to hardware failure/damage/normal upgrading requirements, we will be pursuing recompense from the relevant supplier on the basis that the equipment was selected based on the original specifications provided.
- 3.06 The PDA supplier provided an alternative device for testing out on-site which is a higher specification and a 3G device. This is currently being tested by an operative to identify whether there is an improvement

and whether current issues such as 'no comms' and being unable to use both phone and data still occur. Flintshire has now requested a further three devices so that thorough testing of these PDA's can be undertaken in different geographical areas, by different trades and with varying amounts of data being transferred.

3.07 35 Responsive Repair staff are now using PDA's and any problems are recorded on an error log and submitted to the software supplier. Meetings have also been set-up between Housing IT, Asset Management and Corporate IT to ensure consistent and effective communication and to ensure that response times for hardware issues are reduced as much as possible. A further 15 operatives are to go live with PDA's over the next few weeks these being a mixture of more Responsive Repairs staff, Electricians and Disabled Adaptations.

3.08 **Summary of current position at 31.12.12**

- 35 Responsive Repairs staff live and using PDA's
- Job monitoring software being rolled out with supervisors
- Internal IT support allocated to Housing Asset Management to aid with day to day issues
- Monthly review and progress meetings with Operations Manager with the software supplier being held
- The software and PDA supplier to investigate infrastructure clashes between devices and software and configuration
- Operative on-site testing an alternative PDA device

3.09 **Proposed next steps**

- 15 further operatives to go live with PDA's over next two weeks
- Gas staff to be trained by 31st March and go live with job tickets on PDA's. A solution for gas certification still needs to be agreed.
- Voids team's use of mobile working to be reviewed. Due to the nature of their work there is less benefit in this group using this technology.
- An alternative device to be investigated during 2013 to enable a single device to be used medium term
- Work to continue to establish whether the original device has been wrongly supplied by or whether the software supplier has wrongly specified the type of device needed.
- Work to continue with the software supplier for some resolution over the need to upgrade to Version 10 and more recently to have a 3G device despite this not being part of the original requirements at purchase.

4.00 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

4.01 That Committee consider and support the action taken to resolve issues, in order to take forward mobile working in Housing Services.

5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.01 None as a direct result of this report

6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT

6.01 None as a direct result of this report

7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

7.01 None as a direct result of this report

8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT

8.01 None as a direct result of this report

9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

9.01 None as a direct result of this report

10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED

10.01 None as a direct result of this report

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

11.01 None as a direct result of this report

12.00 APPENDICES

12.01 None

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985
BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

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