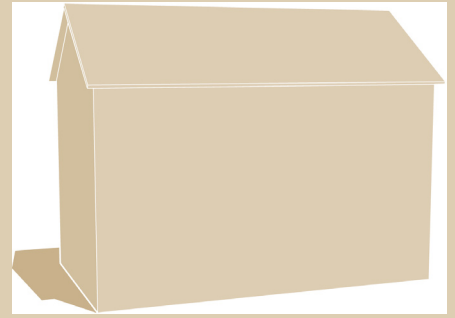


Improving the Housing Voids Process using Lean Systems Thinking



From Possibility...

BACKGROUND

Yorkshire Housing is a £70m turnover charitable business employing over 750 people and manages more than 16,500 homes across Yorkshire. The organisation was formed in 1999 when Ryedale Housing Association and Yorkshire Metropolitan Housing Association merged to become Yorkshire Housing. It is geographically dispersed across Yorkshire with offices in 7 locations.

As an organisation dedicated to continuous improvement, Yorkshire Housing identified that they needed to approach change in a way that would engage and enthuse front line staff. The organisation identified a problem with their voids process, voids describes what happens from notification of tenancy termination until a new tenant begins their tenancy in the vacated property. Yorkshire Housing engaged Ad Esse Consultants to apply Lean systems thinking to the process.

OUR APPROACH

The three main objectives of the project were to:

- Reduce the time it takes to re-let void properties, therefore reducing the overall costs of voids
- Improve the customer experience of the end to end voids process
- Prove that a Lean approach would deliver tangible improvement and engage staff in continuous improvement.

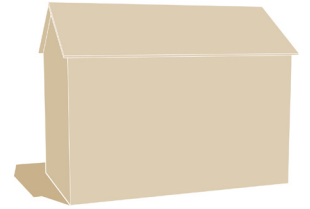
The project began with a diagnostic, across all seven offices where voids were managed. The aim was to fully understand the current processes and the level of variation across the teams. The next stage was to work with a pilot team to develop a new way of working using Lean principles and pilot the process.

The process undertaken can be summarised as follows:



ad•*esse*
consulting

1. An initial scoping meeting was conducted to define project boundaries, identify key stakeholders and pilot team.
2. Representatives from pilot team mapped out their 'As Is' void process in a workshop and identified key issues including problems and what works well. Organisational data was requested and analysed to better understand performance and workload.
3. The 'As Is' voids process was validated with the six other teams across Yorkshire, the differences were mapped out and key issues including problems and what works well were identified.
4. The pilot team were trained in basic Lean principles and created the 'To Be' process using the principles of waste removal/ reduction, flow and pull. The findings from the diagnostic phase and proposals for process changes were then presented to the project steering group for approval to pilot.
5. The roll out activity included: Creating new and standardised paperwork/ materials, development of performance monitoring metrics, Lean awareness and new process training for all staff involved, foundation tools training and implementation (Information Centres, daily briefings and 5S). With the new materials in place the team then implemented the new processes.
6. A formal review was conducted with the project steering group which looked at the benefits of the new way of working.



DIAGNOSTIC FINDINGS

Ad Esse consultants applied our standard diagnostic model to look not only at the processes involved in delivering a Voids service, but also at other factors that impact on voids performance or the success of the improvement project. The findings were fed back to the project steering group. The main findings are shown below.

Process

- Three sets of people were involved in the end to end voids process:
 - o The neighbourhood team, responsible for tenant management and re-letting the property
 - o The voids team, responsible for co-ordinating all works, managing contractors, and surveying properties
 - o The contractors responsible for carrying out various works on the void properties
- We found that performance targets drove work and priorities, not customer demand
- The three teams were working to conflicting targets and demands
- Work was being pushed through the process with no regard to existing queues or backlogs at previous stages
- There were lots of hand-offs in the process creating waiting and delays
- Many additional checking stages and excess paperwork had been maintained from past external audits
- Findings suggested that the quality of the works being completed was generally good
- Devising solutions and standards for the above
- Implementing the Sort, Set and Shine and Standardise stages of the 5S tool back in the office.

To Actuality...

DEVELOPING THE NEW PROCESS

The pilot team attended a two day process re-design workshop to review the existing value stream maps and standards and identify improved ways of working. Below is a summary of the changes suggested, together with the waste that this would reduce.

CHANGE DESCRIPTION	WASTE TYPE REMOVED/ REDUCED
References for the potential tenant taken earlier	Waiting
Removal of management sign off for allocation decision	Over-processing
Assess for furnished tenancy at home visit so provisions can be put in place sooner	Waiting
Removal of hand-offs at initial notice stage	Transportation, Movement, Waiting, Inventory
Pre termination visit to be only completed by Neighbourhood Officer not Surveyor too	Over-processing
Properties to be worked on in line with customer demand not against old targets	Over-production
Remove pre-voids inspection form at pre termination visit	Over-processing
Surveyor to always complete Voids inspection first so key safe is fitted to reduce delays and movement of people & keys	Waiting, Movement
Standardised use of documentation	Over-processing, Errors & Re-work
Contractors to work to a target date set by surveyor	Over-processing

To underpin the process changes suggested by the team, Ad Esse supported the implementation of Lean Foundation tools in a pilot office. These tools had an instant impact on the team. The introduction of 5S was a useful first step in getting the pilot site ready to take on the new voids processes. The physical environment was cleansed of 35 years worth of inherited paperwork and equipment, instantly giving the team more space. The team then conducted a 5S mapping exercise to agree the logical layout for equipment and paperwork.

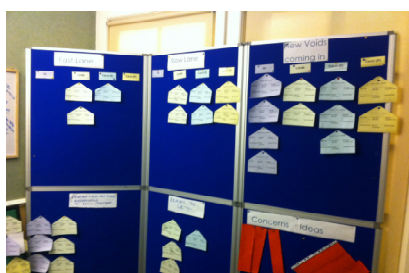


Outcome of the 'Sort' phase

After the 'Set in Order' phase

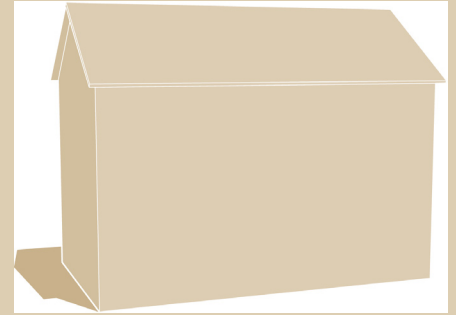


As part of the introduction of Lean Foundation, Information Centres and daily briefings were introduced into the pilot office. These daily meetings enabled the team to manage their process and performance through visual controls.



The information centre consisted of a visual representation of team workload alongside other elements such as the process maps, concern/ ideas slips, success/ performance measures, and team messages.

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BENEFITS

The new process went live on the 6th December 2010 and was run for 12 weeks, a period which included some of the heaviest snows for 30 years, adding many extra challenges. At the end of this period, the pilot team and the Ad Esse consultant presented the tangible and intangible benefits of the new ways of working to the project steering group. These were:

- Staff empowerment to design the process and problem solve had had an impact on the team culture – during the pilot period the team had completed and implemented a further 20 improvement ideas
- Removal of disjointed targets had removed conflicting priorities and improved working relationships between the neighbourhood and void teams
- More efficient working place following the 5S exercise
- Increased use of visual management means less time is spent managing the process and more time delivering customer value

The numbers...

- Total property void period reduced by 52% to an average 24.5 days
- Process end to end value add ratio increase from 2.6% to 5.5%
- A 50% reduction in rent loss per property
- Annual rent loss savings of £68,600 which equates to a 343% return on consultancy spend in the first year
- The Lean pilot, combined with other quality improvement activity, led to a complete elimination of repeated repairs required within a month of a void being filled.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

There is always scope to improve processes further and deliver more customer value, the pilot team are continuing to identify and implement local improvements.

Quote from Helen - Neighbourhood Manager, Malton Team:

Because staff were frustrated with the current process it didn't take a lot of persuading for them to be 100% behind the project. The results however have been way beyond our expectations. One of the best ideas that has come out of the project has been the daily briefings around the information centre and, because we are very strict on the timing for this (10 minutes max), it's not been too onerous on workload."

FURTHER INFORMATION

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