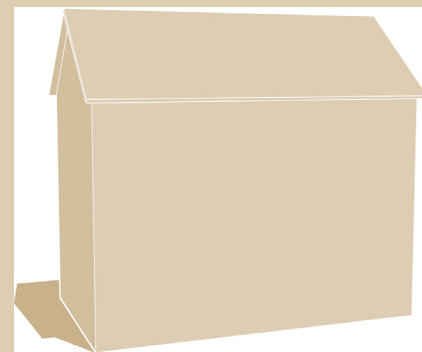


Improving Voids & Lettings at A2 Dominion



From Possibility...

BACKGROUND

A2 Dominion, formed in 2008, is a leading not-for-profit provider of housing with 33,000 homes in London and the south, and 3,000 more in development. They cover a wide geographical area from Bristol to Kent and Cambridgeshire to the Sussex coast, including London. A2 Dominion offers a wide range of options from sheltered housing to affordable rented accommodation.

With a 60-year history and being part of the G15, they are founded on strong community values and a desire to improve. key business objectives are to:

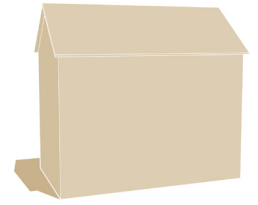
- Provide high quality homes
- Deliver excellent customer service
- Improve your existing homes and places
- Strengthen local communities
- Develop a stronger organisation.

It is in this context that their customer service strategy turned its focus to business process reviews, using Lean techniques.

The Voids and Lettings process was selected as the first such review, led by Ad Esse Consultants, utilising internal champion resource. The aim was to fully understand the current processes, their variations across the organisation before designing a new process. Reducing the time it takes to re-let void properties, improve the customer offering and evaluate the use of Lean in the organisation were the key objectives.



OUR APPROACH



The service review process used Lean techniques to diagnose issues, identify areas of improvement, and implement an improved process. Lean stability tools such as visual management, 5S and the use of Information Centres form part of the new way of working. There were several stages of the work; planning, training, conducting the diagnostic, creating the new process and rolling it out in a pilot area.

Planning

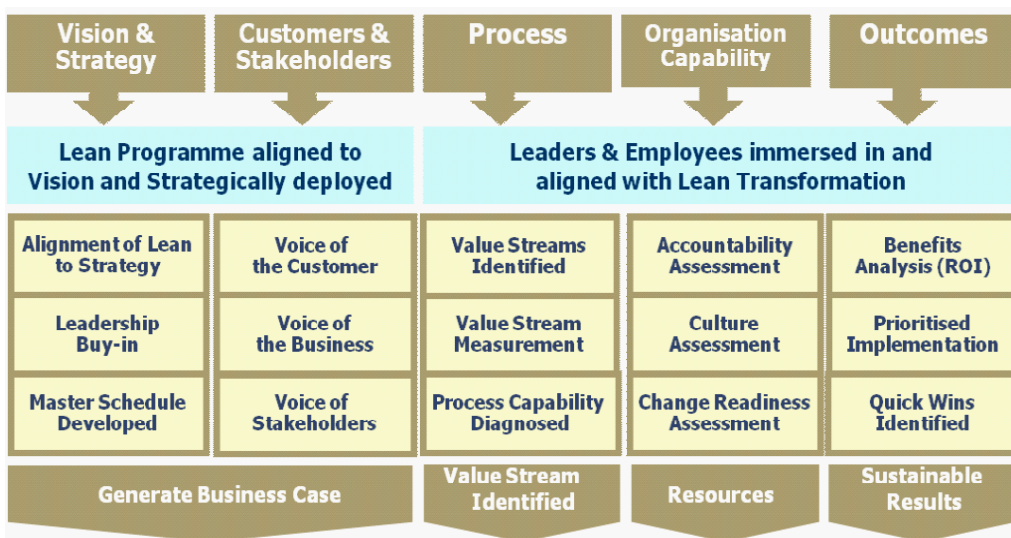
The first stage involved meeting with key stakeholders to ensure all parties were in agreement of the objectives and gained a shared view of the work that was involved. This enabled all the interested parties to understand how the process will work and therefore free up any resources required for the project.

Training

The internal Champions shadowed the consultants, received structured training and became active, hands-on change agents. This allows them to play a greater role in subsequent service reviews.

Diagnostic

At Ad Esse, we have developed our own diagnostic approach (Fig 1) that ensures all facets of the subject are interrogated to a level suitable for the task at hand. Please click here for an in depth look at the diagnostic model.



As the project was process focused, we carried out the following to understand, in great detail, the current processes, performance and procedures:

- Mapping of the 'as-is' value stream for voids & letting with a selected team of operational staff who work in the process;
- Verification of performance, to understand similarities and variation across services and regional offices;
- Further data collection and analysis to back up our observations.

Develop and pilot the new process

After reporting back our findings and agreeing the parameters of change we undertook the following:

- Generation of ideas and redesign of the new process, led by operational staff;
- Testing of the new process in pilot environment including roll out of Lean stabilisation tools;
- Developed a workable implementation plan including communicating and gaining acceptance at all relevant levels.

The results of the approach are outlined in the next section.

To Actuality...

As Is findings

Mapping the processes across the regional offices, meeting with staff at all levels from A2 Dominion and their partners provided a great deal of insight into the way the Lettings teams operated. We spent a portion of time reviewing their voice of the customer (VoC) data to understand their perspective on what is in place and areas to improve. Performance measurement was a key area of the organisation to investigate, as this enables us to understand the current position and to then identify areas of waste that could be tackled.

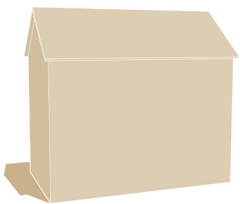
Voice of Customer, Stakeholder and Business

- Survey information looked favourable but when speaking to the customer contact team they suggested a different picture. Issues centered around the quality of the repairs when a tenant moves in;
- A great deal of duplication from team to team, with tasks repeated due to errors or a lack of clarity on the information available;
- Staff have a very large burden of forms and general administrative tasks;
- "Difficult to let" properties cause large issues for staff having to cycle through the process repeatedly until they are let;
- Contractor relationship has the opportunity for more cooperative contact with the business; a less "them" and "us" outlook was a desired outcome;
- The staff approach and willingness to change was positive and they relished the opportunity to have a hand a in creating a better way of working.

Process

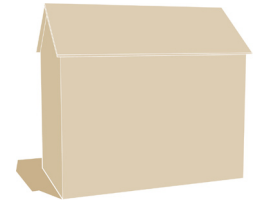
A2 Dominion has a wide geographical spread, with each area dealing with separate councils and their varying processes. As such, it was expected that we would identify multiple processes and working practices that have developed over time. The Value Stream Mapping exercise commenced at Oxford and gave us a basis to work from, gathering data on cycle time, delays, adjacent process steps, hand-offs and job roles:

- As envisaged the 5 sites visited showed 5 different 'As Is' processes - some differences were outside of A2 Dominion control, but most were due to each Lettings teams installing their desired ways of working;
- Different processes for different properties managed from a single site – this was a result of individuals having different levels of experience and therefore approach;
- Different roles and different titles between teams – hand offs between teams occurred at different points, with some sites taking on all roles, with others covered by several teams and individuals.



Variation in how different teams and individuals included:

- Requirements of Notice
- Handling keys
- Approval type – references v. verification
- Viewing before or after approval
- Viewing with multiple or single applicants
- Likelihood of doing multiple view
- Responsibilities for Pre-void and Sign-up meetings
- Location of sign-up meeting
- Recording / reporting on process & property



The variation in the process has resulted in differing performance across the organisation, reducing the variation is a key driver in A2 Dominion undertaking the service reviews. To get a clear view on the impact the variation has we carried out detailed data analysis.

Measurement

Over the past few years A2 Dominion have moved towards using the Universal Housing (UH) management system. At present old measurement systems run in parallel with UH and a central voids spreadsheet acts as the main means of measuring void turn-around performance. Targeted milestones are captured to measure the time the property is with the contractor for repair and then with the lettings. Below is the model they are working to (fig 2) and the actual way the process operates according to the data (fig 3). This highlighted the gap between the desired and the actual process.

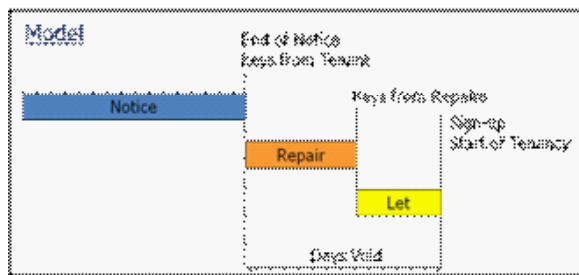


Fig 2

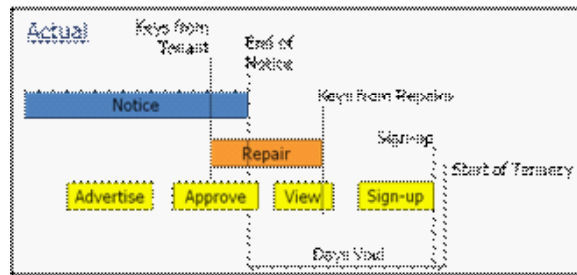


Fig 3

We concluded that there was scope to reduce the time taken to re-let a property by cutting out repetition, duplication and removing several steps which were adding less value than the effort they demanded. As is evident from fig 4, the process times varied across the regions both in total and when broken down. Fig 5 shows the potential for improvement with the large proportion in ENV/A (Essential Non Value Add) the first area to tackle.

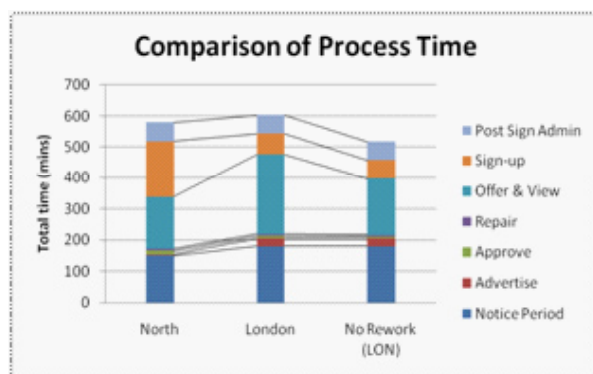


Fig 4

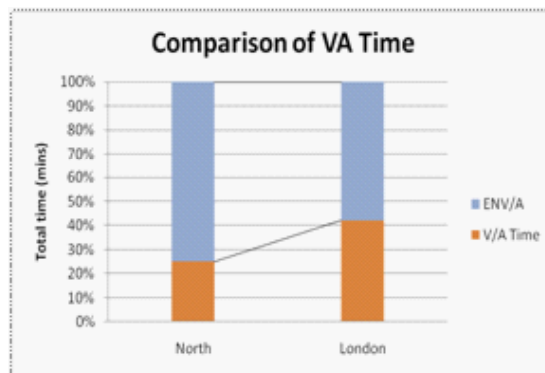


Fig 5

Developing the new process

After a 2-day workshop comprising operational staff from Lettings and other parts of the business an improved process was designed. This centred around two key principles; Error Prevention and Simplification:

- Error Prevention
 - To reduce number of unsuccessful viewings - re-booking a viewing and the subsequent travel time involved causes large delays in the process;
 - Maximising value from pre-void meeting – a physical visit adds little value at this stage and is resource heavy;
 - Maximising value from the sign-up session – too much detail increases the chance of errors occurring;
 - Visual Letable Standard – making this clearer to both the tenant and A2 Dominion reduces the tenant making unfounded claims post sign up, cutting down on the re-work involved in post void repairs and improves the customer experience; and
 - Linkage to Asset Management / handling “hard to lets” – A large amount of time is wasted on the hard to let properties.

The process and its associated documents have been displayed in the working area for the team to use as a reference and a focal point for continuous improvement activities (Fig 6). Each step of the process is mapped out in order and the standardised work elements attached.

- Simplify
 - Different roles at different sites – creates delays and confusion as to who does what;
 - Consistent approval mechanism;
 - Clear mechanism for ensuring (communal) keys available for repair – massive delays when keys are not available;
 - Minimise the administration forms – adds little value to the customer and creates a large amount of work for the teams.

Once the new process was outlined by the group as a whole and signed off by the management team, the operational staff, lead by the Lean Champions and the consultants worked up the detailed process to be tried.

THE BENEFITS

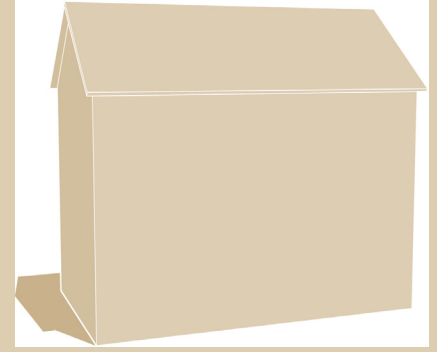
The new process that has been developed has produced several benefits;

- The number of steps has been reduced, with pre-void visits now conducted over the phone (2 hour saving);
- The forms used in the process have been greatly reduced and improved (reduced from 8 to 3);
- Applicants are screened prior to a viewing to flush out those who are not interested, resulting in less re-work;
- This has resulted in a reduced throughput and Cycle time with a estimated to be a saving of 20 days for throughput time (60 to 40) and 3 hours for cycle time (10 to 7)
 - o A cashable saving of £5,100 per day (the cost of a void property) will equate to £102,000
- The process is visual and much clearer to follow with the introduction of visual management

The pilot is still in its early stages but the new process adheres more closely the expectations of staff and customers, with expected improvement of tennant satisfaction resulting in reducing the tenant management workload.



Improving Voids & Lettings at A2 Dominion



Underpinning the process change, the stability tools have 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 process. The physical environment was made fit for the new process, work is easily visible and the working area much more harmonious as a result.

The process and its associated documents have been displayed in the working area for the team to use as a reference and a focal point for continuous improvement activities (Fig 6). Each step of the process is mapped out in order and the standardised work elements attached.

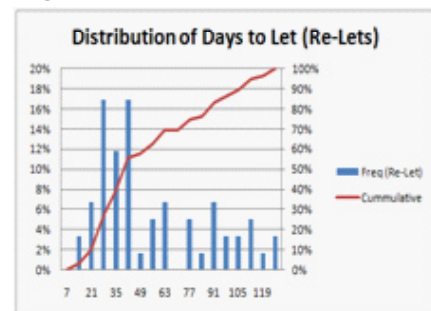
Fig 6



Fig 7



Fig 8



The Information Centre is also up and running (Fig 7), with daily meetings being used to track continuous improvement ideas, tackle operational issues using the Concern Containment and Countermeasure (CCC) strips and assess the work required for the day ahead. The team have commented that they “Want all meetings to be 10 minute stand-ups”. The Information Centre is also now set up to display Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) which the team are updating (Fig 8) reviewing on a weekly basis, creating a great deal of transparency and giving an instant view the impact of the new process is having.

Where next?

The pilot site will continue to embed the process with continuous improvement being undertaken as each process element is used and reviewed. Once this has been run the new process will be rolled out across the organisation, creating a consistent customer offering across the organisation. The possibility to deploy staff from office to office will become possible due the reduction of variation enabling A2 Dominion to react to any fluctuations in demand across the Lettings teams.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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