

INVU IN ACTION: A Lindenhouse Case Study

Document management solutions for Housing Associations



Around 2,000 housing associations in England and many more in other parts of the UK are responsible for providing affordable housing. They meet the housing needs of individuals and families from a wide range of backgrounds, providing homes for rent and also helping many first-time buyers to get a foot on the property ladder. Over five million people live in more than two million homes for which the housing associations are responsible.

The task of managing dozens, hundreds or even thousands of homes and the needs of their occupiers is a daunting one, which housing associations strive to fulfil to the highest standards. For all associations, large or small, the burden of administration is heavy and potentially generates a massive quantity of documentation that requires storage arrangements that permit ready access days, weeks, months or years down the road – or right now. The documents relate to tenants, properties, maintenance issues and the management of payments. The Social HomeBuy scheme may generate more paper.

Operational efficiency is vital for housing associations, particularly in a harsher economic climate. As Housing Corporation deputy chief executive Peter Marsh said at the 2008 Chartered Institute of Housing Conference: ***“The Housing Corporation is responsible for investing public money in housing associations and for protecting that investment. Associations can deal with difficult economic conditions through measures that include managing core business efficiencies. The single most significant variable in housing association 30-year business plans is operating-cost inflation.”***

A substantial contribution to operational efficiency at a growing number of housing associations is resulting from the adoption of computerised document management systems. The benefits of such systems include substantial reductions in the space required for paper file storage, rapid access to required documents including archive items, and the streamlining of day-to-day administrative processes. Association staff are therefore enabled to operate more cost-effectively so that investment in a document management system may be quickly recouped, with cost savings thereafter.

A housing association of any size can reap the benefits, as Gary Stewart of Lindenhouse Software explains: ***“A number of housing associations have become users of the Invu document management system, which we supply on a bespoke basis to housing associations, universities, church dioceses, accountants and other users. Servite Housing Association in Dundee, for example, has a 10-user system, while Octavia in West London has 70 users and Gwalia in Swansea has a system with around 200 users.”***

Founded in 1984, Servite Housing Association has an established reputation built around the provision of housing for older people. However, in recent years new developments have focused on housing which is flexible in design to accommodate the needs of a wider customer base. Management intends to develop properties which will feature energy efficiency and, through the introduction of modern methods of construction, offer safe, secure and affordable homes. Servite Housing Association is a registered social landlord (RSL) with the Scottish Housing Regulator.

“As regards administrative functions here at Servite, we aim to exploit technology to ensure maximum efficiency,” points out IT Officer Kathy Robertson. ***“An Invu document management system has been used for several years by our finance department for scanning in large amounts of data and is used regularly for chasing invoices through the pipeline. Our experience of Lindenhouse has been that they have dealt professionally with any issues arising. This first-class level of support has led us to consider making wider use of Invu and linking in our branch office in Perth via Citrix.”***

Octavia Housing & Care provide about 3,700 homes for individuals and families on low incomes in west London boroughs, deliver care and support for older or vulnerable people and invest in local communities. Octavia installed an Invu document management system from another supplier some time ago, key objectives being to enhance management of their purchase ledger and speed up of the payment authorization process for their many property maintenance bills. They switched to Lindenhouse in search of a better level of service.

“The Invu system at Octavia has been overseen by Lindenhouse Software since late-2007,” explains Chris Mower of Octavia. ***“So, it’s still quite early days but so far I think they’ve provided a very good service. Lindenhouse have been very quick to respond to support requests. I’m very happy with their helpdesk as, unlike some support contractors, they will not bury or forget about any hard-to-solve problem. This is invaluable to me because it means I don’t have to keep chasing them and tracking the query.”***

Swansea-based Grŵp Gwalia Cyf is a not-for-profit housing association with charitable rules and a registered social landlord regulated by the Welsh Assembly Government. It is a leading provider of social housing in south and mid Wales, managing over 5,500 high quality, affordable homes and meeting the needs of a diverse range of people in the community. It is committed to building and maintaining high quality social housing at affordable rents in sustainable communities.

Gwalia is a forward-looking operation, as the Group’s Alan Thomson explains: ***“The core values that underpin all Group companies include a commitment to best practice and innovation, seeking excellence in all that the Group does, continually improving upon existing practice and developing innovative solutions to new challenges. This includes a determination to use technology wherever this delivers financial benefits and improves the quality of service we provide.***

“To help ensure the efficient and effective use of resources, a document management system has been in use here for some years albeit for relatively limited purposes. However, since Lindenhouse has become involved the Invu system has been enhanced to deliver more effectively what we want from it. The primary advantage for us at present is for financial record retention. We scan financial documents for archive, saving the space that paper files would have occupied.”

Housing Associations whose administrative staff are at risk of drowning in paperwork could join their counterparts at Servite, Octavia and Gwalia in a work environment less cluttered with paper. By choosing to talk to Lindenhouse, they will be able to draw not only upon proven knowledge and expertise but also an eagerness to listen. It is by listening and properly understanding a potential user's operational needs that Lindenhouse is able to ensure that they benefit from a bespoke system that does what they require and also integrates with existing systems upon which the user depends.

About Lindenhouse

Lindenhouse provides quality IT products and services to a wide range of companies and, increasingly, to educational and ecclesiastical establishments. The company is a Premier Partner of Invu Services and is the world's largest reseller of Invu software.

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