Reducing annual cyclical inspections by two months every year with mobile working

settle.

Settle Group has saved hundreds of hours of back-office time and **reduced by two months the surveying period for its annual repairs programme** by introducing mobile working. Its building surveyors are now using MX, NDL's Mobile Application Platform when they inspect properties, eliminating paper forms and enabling automatic transfer of reports into the back-office QL housing management system.

The Challenge

Settle Group has a housing stock of over 9000 properties. It carries out wide-ranging planned and cyclical maintenance programmes to keep properties in the best possible condition, ensuring both quality and cost-effectiveness in its property management.

Some planned repairs are carried out based on the age of a property, such as re-roofing and re-wiring. In addition, every seven years all properties on specific estates are individually inspected and assessed for other types of repairs on items such as chimneys, gutters, paths, driveways and brickwork. Any work identified is then programmed to be carried out the following year. Therefore, at any given time, one seventh of the property portfolio is undergoing a bespoke maintenance programme, with another seventh being surveyed for repairs the following year.

Previously, when its surveyors visited these properties they recorded on multiple printed forms the specific repairs needed, with 500 different types of entries possible covering task, trade required, quantity, location, unit of measurement and miscellaneous extra works. These forms were then later inputted onto a spreadsheet manually by a member of the clerical team, double checked by a surveyor, corrected if necessary and then transferred into the back-office housing management system. The whole process of data collection and processing was not just time

Key Benefits

Hundreds of hours of back-office time saved

Two-month reduction in annual inspections cycle

Data accuracy improved

Real-time information on properties available

Improved management information

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I had no idea that technology could work so well in something like this. Our IT team was brilliant in the way they did this: they listened to everything we said and came up with exactly what we needed to support these inspections.

Steve Foulds
Building Technician, Settle Group

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The Solution ↓

consuming: input errors occurred, even within the final documentation. It was obvious that the process needed to change and the decision to move to mobile working was made.

The Solution

Settle Group was already using SX, NDL's RPA Platform, and realised that MX, NDL's Mobile Application Platform and corporate server platform, would support its aims to automate the property inspection forms. MX allows users to design, deploy and manage multiple bespoke and secure mobile applications across different types of devices. Using these applications, mobile workers can operate on or offline, taking information from back-office systems with them and updating it from the field.

Indy Bhogal, Software Business Analyst, started work on developing an app to replace the complicated paper forms used by the surveyors but immediately recognised that he needed to understand exactly what the surveyors did. He therefore spent time out on site as well as discussing in detail with the property team throughout the development process exactly what they needed from the app.

Indy believes this approach is critical to successful mobile working: "It's really important to understand their processes and how you can mimic these so they don't have to learn something completely new. As a result of doing this, we got the app right from the start rather than having to go through lots of iterations, which meant they really wanted to use it."

The app runs on iPads and replicates very closely the previous paper system. It enables surveyors to enter all the tasks, trades, quantities, locations, etc and also to put in miscellaneous notes. They can work either on or offline and connect either through 4G or wifi, uploading and downloading data to and from the back-office housing management system.

For more information about NDL's Digital Transformation Suite;

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MX Product
Mobile Apps

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From a developer's perspective, MX is very easy to pick up and does a great job. It allows you to develop exactly what you want to make it as user friendly as possible.

Indy Bhogal
Software Business Analyst, Settle Group
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The Benefits

As a result of introducing mobile working, it has been estimated that the **time it takes to complete the annual cyclical inspections will be reduced by two months in each year.** In addition, five to ten minutes per property is saved in the time it takes to input data, which amounts to hundreds of hours' of back-office time saved. There is also far greater accuracy in data.

According to Steve Foulds, the building technician who was closely involved in the development of the app, "As well as streamlining the way we enter information, the new system gives us real-time information on the properties we are inspecting when we arrive. It's a clean, seamless and accurate way of working. But also managers can get realistic overviews immediately of what is going on. It's a great piece of kit and very intuitive, and everyone is sold on it."

What's Next?

Now that phase one has been successfully completed, there are plans to extend the application further. This will focus on handovers, snagging and payments, as well as taking the contracts through to practical completion and final accounts, which will complete the entire process and save even more time.