

Striving for Excellence: Cardiff Community Housing Association chooses Carval as their HR Software Partner

Cardiff Community Housing Association is known for delivering high standards. An essential element of their success relies on the people they employ and the way they are managed. This made the use of effective HR management systems a prerequisite. Against a backdrop of challenge they decided that they needed to specify a new system that would meet both current and future needs....

Cardiff Community Housing Association (CCHA) is an Industrial and Provident Society with charitable status. The Association is the result of a merger between Adamsdown Housing Association and Moors Housing Association in 1996. Combined, they have provided homes and services in Cardiff for over 30 years. The Association is registered with and supervised by the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) and manages a housing stock of approximately 2,500 homes.

Striving For Excellence Across The Business

In their pursuit of following best practise guidelines, CCHA has responded positively to demands from WAG to adopt new approaches such as Lean Thinking and working SMART. This has, in turn, driven CCHA to ensure optimum efficiency and accuracy in their work, wherever possible.

CCHA has proved successful in adopting these practices and has won awards for its approach across many categories including regeneration and diversity. They have also been recognised for striving to achieve customer excellence in all areas of business, both internally and externally.

The last few years have been a challenging time for the Association which has undergone a period of change, by responding to a rapidly changing housing sector; especially with the emergence of the Integrate Consortium, involving 10 housing associations across Wales, including CCHA. Working in Partnership is high on the WAG's agenda following the Essex Review, which demands that associations work closely and effectively together. This has brought about a number of fresh challenges in the way CCHA shares knowledge and ideas. It has also involved changes in working practises.

Introducing New and Innovative HR Policies

One of the core elements of how CCHA meets its objectives and targets is in its exemplary interface with its employees. In all there are just over 100 staff across three sites. Twelve are external workers who work 'on-site'; 70 are at either the 'Head Office' where the Property Team is based along with support services such as HR, Finance and IT, or at the Housing Services office; and a further 17 staff are employed by Care & Repair to whom CCHA is the host organisation.

CCHA aims to be an excellent employer and maintains Flexible Working practises. A "Better Balance" policy allows employee's to have a measure of control over when, where and how they work. The scheme reflects CCHA's core workplace value that allows an individual's right to a fulfilled life inside and outside work. This is a new and innovative policy which allows home working, compressed working, start and finish time variants, and team based solutions.

Clearly, in delivering such high standards to its staff, coupled with the ever evolving pressures of legislative and statutory change, effective HR management is a prerequisite. CCHA's HR team aim to be at the forefront of current HR management thinking and take their inspiration from the CIPD (the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development) and the private sector. Their focus is on being proactive and forward thinking.

A Complete HR Management Systems Review

It was this drive to meet the highest standards that led them to start a lengthy review of their HR management systems. At that stage, the HR team were working mainly with Access Databases, which proved slow, unreliable and caused considerable duplication of work. Paper was the main source of processing policy and procedure and this all

too often resulted in requests and amendments being held up. Loss of paper based documents also resulted in wasted time and effort particularly where signatures were required. This, the HR team felt, was unacceptable.

As a result, a project group consisting of the HR and IT teams was set up to assess the business needs both for the HR team itself and for the end users; the staff. It was decided that CCHA needed to replace the aging Access databases as it would be difficult developing them further to keep pace with legislative and internal process changes.

Developing a Specification

In terms of producing a specification for a replacement, the CCHA project team faced twin challenges. They needed to find a system that would not only meet the needs of a committed and dynamic HR team but also one that met the requirements of staff.

As a starting point, they decided that they needed to set up and maintain an efficient, yet easy to use, system that supported all the key HR function in terms of managing employees, managing posts and salaries. They also needed to be able to manage training and recruitment processes and be able to follow each process through from start to finish.

There was also a requirement for accurate and efficient HR report writing. Previously, the database was not reliable and the time constraints of using it to generate reports rendered it impractical. As a result, many of the calculations had been manual; which were time consuming and open to mistakes.

Having prescribed the fundamental specification, CCHA decided that they needed to go further. They wanted to provide staff with self-service accessibility to areas such as booking leave, inputting changes to address/bank details and viewing contract fundamentals.

Self-service functionality was also required for areas such as accessing technical competencies and objectives and for risk assessments such as site hazards or lone worker concerns.

Lastly CCHA also wanted more accurate delivery of payroll requirements with more comprehensive information. This would allow better coordination between the HR and Finance.

Finding the Right Software Partner

The CCHA project group carried out an exhaustive review of the HR systems marketplace. They used a tender process to measure each product against current business requirements and future proofing. Jim Sweeney, ICT Manager of CCHA explains: "We needed to build in functionality that met our specific needs. To do this effectively, the chosen supplier had to understand the needs of the HR team in supporting our core values."

The tender process resulted in CCHA choosing the HR Unity range of integrated, flexible and easy-to-use HR solutions from Carval in 2008. Jim Sweeney explains why the project team decided to work with Carval: "Carval was chosen as the software provided the closest match to CCHA's business requirements and it was clear how the bespoke elements would be developed. Carval could, for example, provide bespoke versions of their self-service HR and Time & Attendance systems to manage CCHA's flexi-time, record the appraisal process and generate risk assessments."

"By deploying self-service throughout the system, CCHA staff could access essential data remotely, using browser technology, wherever they were and whenever they needed it. With this level of functionality and its market provenance, Carval stood out as the company most likely to develop systems successfully in partnership with CCHA."

More Effective and Leaner HR Management

With the new system in place, CCHA gained more effective and leaner management of HR in terms of external factors such as legislation, training, and recruitment. HR reporting also became a far more rapid, comprehensive and flexible process allowing management and staff to make faster, more informed decisions. In addition, the Time and Attendance module supported CCHA's Better Balance initiative; enabling the HR team to manage home working, compressed working and start and finish time variants more effectively.

Louise Sulley, HR Manager continues, "There were a great number of tangible benefits with the new HR system. Overall, it was a huge step forward to be able to base decisions upon reports that previously we were unable to create. In addition,

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Louise Sulley, HR Manager

the ability of our staff to utilise the self-service functionality has saved a great deal of administration time internally and has been well received by the staff themselves. Most importantly though, we did not need to compromise in any way on our core values; in fact the Self Service side of the system helped to reinforce them.”

“In practise, we are also now able to input and amend details quickly and accurately and customise screens to cater for new procedures and processes as they arise. The new system has also allowed the devolvement of HR processes to Team Managers.”

On the technology side, the Carval solution delivered a robust SQL server system that consolidates HR core and self service data into a single point of management. This was far easier to manage the continuity of data and service with an increased ability to roll systems to staff working remotely.”

In short, CCHA sought an HR system that would help their Human Resources team meet the challenges they faced in delivering the highest levels of service. In choosing Carval they believe they have found a system that will help them rise to that challenge.

“Carval have demonstrated a very clear understanding of CCHA’s needs and we have worked well together putting bespoke solutions in place.”

Jim Sweeney, ICT Manager

