

National Housing Federation

With around 1400 non-profit making housing organisations currently in their membership The National Housing Federation is the body that represents the independent social housing sector within England. The Federation seeks a close working relationship with its members and other partners and aims to promote the values, successes and future roles of their members, whilst representing and negotiating for the strategic interests of a diverse but united sector in providing affordable homes to meet the nation's housing social needs. It strives to inform and support members so that they can pursue innovation and excellence in an environment of competition. With the membership continuing to grow and with their commitment to achieving value for money and excellence, it is not surprising that they seek to create and implement quality IT systems in support of their activities.



The National Housing Federation's corporate plan takes as its theme 'Housing's Better Future', yet as a modern representative body the Federation faces its own transformation agenda. It is recognised that if they are to fulfil their mission, working with an increasingly diverse membership, it will require continual changes in their organisational culture, operating methods and the services they deliver. It is vital that as part of managing change that access to best of breed IT support systems are readily available. Quality employees and working practices are key to the organisation and hence the need for suitable HR software systems was recognised as paramount.

Prior to 2002 the HR Department were becoming increasingly frustrated by their existing HR system. Vicky Coulter of the National Housing Federation observed:

"The existing system was at times making the HR team's life a nightmare. It never held data and was difficult to use for reporting purposes. The time spent inputting and re-inputting information into the system was so

disproportionate to the benefits gained that we decided it was time to research what other systems were available"

NHF drew up a detailed search criteria before conducting their search and key elements amongst this criteria included items such as ease and availability of standard reports and ability to use industry standard reporting tools to design new reports, ease of data entry, comprehensiveness of data held and support services available from a potential supplier. It was also important to find a supplier who clearly demonstrated a high level of product and technical knowledge as well as the necessary in depth knowledge of current HR needs and requirements. Cascade were invited to demonstrate their software along with a number of other suppliers. Vicky commented:

"The HR team was very impressed with the look of the system, taken mainly from the look and feel of Microsoft products and parameters of the system. At this stage we were also looking at the presenter (their knowledge as well as manner) and there was much in depth discussion about helpdesk services and assistance with Project plans."

The decision was made to purchase the Personnel, Recruitment and Training modules. At this point it was important

that the strong relationships that had developed between themselves and the Sales Team from Cascade should now be carried over to the relationships to be formed with other areas from within Cascade. A Cascade Project Manager was allocated to NHF and a team identified to ensure a smooth implementation of the software.

"The implementation went very well and we had assistance from Cascade at all stages throughout the process as well as actual implementation. "

The training was timed to ensure maximum benefit at appropriate times for users and was conducted at the NHF offices:

"The training was intensive and as there had been a reasonable time between seeing the system for the first time and going live, we were once again, surprised at how good the system is and the flexibility available from within the system, which allows us to shape the system to suit our own business needs."

Given that the system had met its functionality expectations it was important to NHF that the relationship between themselves and Cascade continued to grow, whether it be with their Account Manager, their Trainers or in day to day contact with the Helpdesk.

“Every person from Cascade that we have had contact with has been polite, personable, friendly and more than willing to help, advise and assist. Their manner is always polite and upbeat”

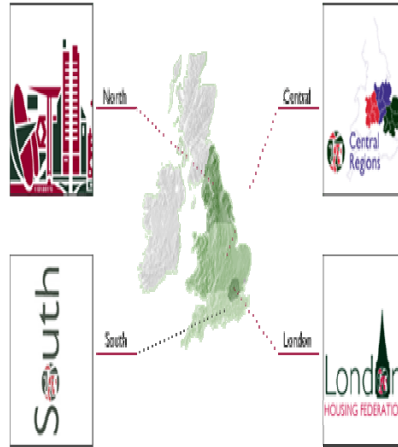
The HR department's recommendations for Cascade were clearly not just based on the system and functionality (strong though they are) but also about the level of service that is provided both short and long term.

The system has now bedded in and already has made significant impact on the HR Department and NHF as a whole. Deborah Harouma commented:

“By the nature of our organisation, both in terms of its accountability and its regional structure, it is important that we are continually able to demonstrate value for money from our systems”

Apart from the standard reports supplied with the system, the HR Department have quickly become skilled in the Report Writing tools and feel equipped to answer the demands placed on them for regular and ad-hoc reports requested from Managers. The ease of link between the product and the Microsoft products already utilised at NHF mean that production of standard letters and documentation has quickly been adopted. Leave requests and authorisation is an

example where the system has made a considerable impact on the processes from day 1.



As for the future, both NHF and Cascade recognise the need for a system that is flexible and will grow and change just as organisations themselves will grow and change. The intranet module will further allow NHF to facilitate managerial access to their employee records as well as remove yet more of the administrative burden from the HR Department allowing individual employees to perform tasks such as applying for leave on line. Organisation charting will also be made far more use of and the ability to produce charts directly from the software and then to publish these charts directly to their company intranet is more functionality that will be built upon by NHF.

In addition to the strong and on-going relationships that have been formed between NHF and Cascade, Vicky Coulter summarised why the implementation at NHF had gone so smoothly internally:

“We are enjoying using the system so much, particularly when compared to our previous system. Our day to day working activities have been influenced so much following the system implementation. So much of the burden of system maintenance has been lifted that we truly believe that this can allow HR to make an even bigger impact on the organisation at a strategic level particularly with the quality of outputs we can now produce. We are still finding out things the system can do and are consistently pleased once we have completed a task that in days gone by, seemed to take an age and be so stressful.”



Contacting Us

To find out how we can help you implement HR systems appropriate to your business needs or to discuss our range of products and services please call us on **0113 255 4115**. Alternatively write to us at the address below or contact us via e-mail at alan.jones@cascadehr.co.uk

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