



## Thames Valley Housing takes IT support home

Online issue logging and in-depth reporting become a reality thanks to Richmond SupportDesk

### Background

Thames Valley Housing develops and manages affordable homes for rent, shared ownership and key workers in the Thames Valley region. Working in conjunction with West London, Surrey, Berkshire, Hampshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire, in partnership with local authorities.

Set up in 1966, the Association is a Registered Social Landlord (RSL) under the Housing Act 1996, and is registered with the Housing Corporation and the National Housing Federation.

Since it finished its first building project in 1968 the number of properties owned and managed has steadily increased. It has maintained a successful record of growth and became Thames Valley Housing Association (TVHA) in 1991 and now manages over 5,000 rented properties and over 4,000 shared ownership properties in London and the Thames Valley basin.



### The Problem

From its Twickenham headquarters, the TVHA IT Service Desk supports over 200 people, made up of office-based staff and housing officers working in the field. But the five-strong IT support team was struggling to cope with the number of calls a symptom of the complex issue logging procedure with the existing helpdesk system, according to Adrian Wepener, IT Technical Support Engineer at TVHA.

*"Our online reporting system was too lengthy and convoluted to encourage users to log issues via the web," he said. "People were pushed to the phones, and that had an effect on the support team's productivity."*

In addition, the TVHA technical team had no real way of running reports on how many calls they were receiving, and whether resolution times were getting better or worse. With no analysis tool, it was also difficult to see an overall view of the kinds of issue that were most common.

*"We couldn't tell if the issues were mainly software or hardware related, and what the key problems people were having over and over again," said Wepener. "We knew it was time to find another system to give us back control point in time."*

### The Solution

Wepener and his team began looking for an answer to their problems. Having evaluated a number of solutions, many were too expensive or didn't provide the ease of use that was needed to reduce calls to the helpdesk. In addition, the technical team needed a system that could be implemented quickly and start making a difference from day one. From their research, one solution stood out over all the others: Richmond SupportDesk.

*"Richmond SupportDesk fitted our needs exactly," said Wepener. "Once we'd made the decision, we were up and running in four days including a full day's training, where Richmond staff spent time with the team here to get them fully up to speed."*

## The Solution continued...

The main element of Richmond SupportDesk that has made the biggest difference is the ability for end users to raise an issue via email, said Wepener. Although Richmond SupportDesk has an online capability, it's not something his team has decided to advertise.

*"The speed and efficiency of being able to send requests to a central email address is ideal for our user base, and means we can more efficiently control how we deal with problems within the team,"* added Wepener.

Richmond SupportDesk has also empowered Wepener and his team to see the common problems users have, including those specific users that have recurring issues. As a result, IT support staff can single out those users that have specific problems (such as when they use Outlook) and give them training to help them help themselves should the problem arise again.

In fact, the information gleaned from the first four months (2,350 logged calls in total) gave the IT team valuable insight into the times of day when support calls are most likely to come in. This, said Wepener, led to a change in how the department is staffed.

*"We realised that our existing shift pattern didn't leave enough people on hand to handle the peaks,"* he commented. *"As a result, we changed the shift patterns to ensure an overlap between 9am and 10am and 4pm and 5pm (our busiest times)."*



## The Future

Inspired by the success that the IT team has experienced with Richmond SupportDesk, there has been interest from other departments at TVHA as to how the system can help them.

One team that has started using the email logging capabilities is Finance, which uses specific email addresses to automate an appropriate response by subject line.

Another department to start using the system is the Policy & Performance team, which uses Richmond SupportDesk's issue logging and reporting to manage requests by staff for the running of reports. Yet another team testing the system is Facilities, which uses the solution to manage maintenance requests from staff members, such as broken lights or kitchen equipment needing service or repair.

*"The fact that Richmond SupportDesk is being used by a growing number of divisions within our organisation is testament to how easy the software has been to integrate into our business,"* said Ana Orbe, IT manager at TVHA.

*"The power and flexibility of the system has meant that more and more people are taking advantage of its potential. What began as a way to improve IT support is rapidly turning into a solution that is permeating our organisation and creating new and undiscovered efficiency wherever it goes."*

*"Overall, Richmond SupportDesk is having a positive impact right across the Association,"* concluded Wepener. *"We are pleased to have been able to streamline our processes and improve the support we provide to the end user, plus introduce other teams to a new way of managing their own specific issues."*