

The Planning Inspectorate uses CACI OfficeBase, powered by Rocket U2, to increase efficiency in managing more than 20,000 cases a year.



The Planning Inspectorate is responsible for managing all planning and enforcement appeals, local development plan enquiries and planning related casework throughout England and Wales. The business is complex and dynamic, dealing with multiple moving dimensions and stringent deadlines. It also has a set of strict business rules, which matches a network of over 400 professionally qualified, home-based inspectors with a workload of approximately 20,000 cases every year for 422 Local Planning Authorities (LPAs).

Situation

The Planning Inspectorate relied on a highly complex manual system to schedule inspection jobs, which was managed by a large team of schedulers whose aim was to maximize the number of jobs carried out within a given period. This involved making constant changes to the inspectors’ schedules in order to deal with the continually evolving workload.

Using their comprehensive knowledge of the inspector workforce, schedulers would select the best inspector for a job based on a set of clearly defined criteria including skills, competencies, grade and location. This could be a lengthy process for more complex inspections, and it could take up to half a day to find the most appropriate person. Many communications between the remote inspector workforce and the centralised team of schedulers were telephone- and paper-based, which was very time intensive.

Implementation

Following a full tender process, the Planning Inspectorate selected OfficeBase from CACI – powered by Rocket Software’s UniData - to help them improve inspection scheduling and resource allocation. The solution, which was delivered on time and to budget within eight months, was fully customised based on the Planning Inspectorate’s unique business requirements and operational processes.

According to Tim Rogers, Charting Manager for the Planning Inspectorate, “the scheduling system allows my staff to schedule casework to an appropriately skilled Inspector resource in a speedier, more transparent and accountable manner.”

Schedulers can now use the software to efficiently match inspectors to jobs based on clearly defined business rules. The software works by providing the scheduler with a colour-coded virtual planner, which shows the current set of jobs against the inspectors for a given time period. OfficeBase then identifies the most appropriate inspector for the job, which is presented as a best-fit percentage ranking, thereby

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Powering Business Solutions

Key benefits:

- 33% reduction in staff required to schedule inspections
- Improved communication with remote workers
- Management information is now generated in minutes, rather than days
- Paper-based records now managed online

“The solution was implemented on time and to budget, and importantly, there is confidence in the system as it has never let the business down.”

Phil Hammond, operations manager, the Planning Inspectorate



allowing schedulers to see straight away who the most appropriate available person is and assign them to that job promptly. The software also uses genetic algorithms to review the inspectors' work schedule for a week's worth of hearings and enquiries to ensure staff resource and travel time are optimized.

Each inspector can now access his or her work schedule through a secure web browser, with any changes to the schedule communicated to them by email. This includes drill-down functionality available against each inspection task, so they can view additional information to help them complete the assignment. Inspectors also complete their timesheets online. Pre-populated information for inspection tasks, which can be overwritten if necessary, are also used to minimise the manual input required by the inspectors.

According to operations manager Phil Hammond, “The solution was implemented on time and to budget, and more importantly, there is confidence in the system as it has never let the business down.”

Susie Siegesmund, VP and General Manager for Rocket U2, says that, “CACI is able to deliver customized solutions quickly, partly due to their use of UniData. UniData's intuitive multivalued data model allows them to easily map complex data into very few tables and develop solutions quickly and efficiently. This results in CACI delivering successful, cost-effective business systems that solve their customers' unique business problems.”

Benefits

John Rendall, Section Manager, for the Planning Inspectorate says that, “the scheduling system has brought significant efficiency improvements to the front and back office. Since implementing this system, the Planning Inspectorate has experienced increased demands on its services by approximately 20% but has nevertheless been able to reduce the number of staff scheduling the inspections by 33%. In addition, there has been a significant reduction in the paper based administrative tasks supporting remote inspectors. All this was achieved without compromising the quality of service to our clients.”

Other benefits include better communication between the remote workforce and head office, as scheduling is more transparent and issues are resolved in a more timely manner. Key user groups, including inspectors and schedulers, have an improved working environment and are strong advocates of the system. Management information, supported by the hyper-efficient underlying UniData database, is now generated in minutes, rather than days, which enables management to better understand where fine-tuning business processes will yield results.

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