

switchee

Case Study:

Flagship



THE PROBLEM

With 22,500 properties across the east of England, maintaining Flagship's property portfolio is a huge task, especially whilst minimising the impact on the resident. With plans to innovate their customer journey end-to-end, the Flagship team needed a solution to aid in their ambition of preventative maintenance. With a variety of different property types in their portfolio, from brand new affordable houses to systems-built tower blocks constructed in the 1960's, no two properties are the same. They all require a variety of different tactics to ensure they remain great homes for their residents.

Flagship wanted to identify how they could continue to provide a great service to their residents – whilst ensuring their wellbeing would be safeguarded. With this in mind - in 2015, the Flagship IT team approached the Flagship Group Board to propose a vision of what a Flagship tenancy might look like in 2030. At the heart of this vision sat a desire to deliver an outstanding service for residents.

And with that, the Flagship Pilot Programme was born: The Board allocated funds to try new technologies. 'Fail fast' is a common technology mantra, but not one widely adopted in a sector understandably sensitive to investments not producing a return. For these pilots the very measure of success was failure: The Board allocated money with the requirement that all trials that didn't work be reported on in one year: "If we're not talking about all of the failed projects in 12 months' time, you've not tried hard enough".

THE SOLUTION

One of the main projects in this Pilot Scheme was Deben road IoT project. In one block of 12 flats on Deben Road, Ipswich, Flagship installed a range of IoT products that included Switchchee, smart locks, smart CCTV, Wi-Fi and iPads. These technologies allowed residents to stream CCTV images from their phones, remotely lock and unlock their properties as well as have their heating pattern optimised. Flagship chose the Deben Road block because it had a diverse range of residents but was average according to most metrics, with average arrears, repairs, home visits and call centre calls. It was therefore easier to assess the performance, positive or negative, of the technologies that were installed.

With the Switchchee smart thermostat installed, Flagship were provided with remote data analytics about property performance through the Switchchee Insights dashboard. Through this platform they were able to see properties at high risk of mould, fuel poverty and overheating, as well as identifying those with poor insulation. Using Switchchee's occupancy data, Flagship could also better schedule maintenance appointments around their residents, helping reduce no-access rates. Furthermore, Switchchee's messaging function enabled Flagship to send energy saving advice to residents and, if high humidity was detected, steps to help residents reduce mould risk.



We're expanding our pilot to in excess of 500 properties. If the improvements we've seen in the small pilot are amplified on a larger scale, it's going to completely change the way we manage our assets."

Matt Brazier, Director of IT,
Flagship

493

Number of Switchchee units being installed in phase 2 following the success of the pilot

£600,000

Saved over the next 10 years through full Switchchee Rollout

1.82 tonnes

CO² saved using Switchchee p.a.



Switchee has made my life much easier, regulating my heating and helping manage my cystic fibrosis. I can set my desired temperature and forget about it."

– Mr. Andrews, Flagship resident

THE RESULTS

Whilst most products installed during the Pilot programme proved to be unscalable due to their reliance on mobile phone applications - 12 smart locks needed 12 mobile phone apps - with its GSM connectivity, this issue was not present with the Switchee installations. Of the 29 new technologies implemented during the trial, only Switchee was carried forward - partly due to its connectivity and partly due to the utility Flagship received from the devices.

One of the biggest developments during the pilot was a change from a reactive to a proactive maintenance service approach. By using Switchee's data to identify potential issues with properties, Flagship were able to make proactive maintenance interventions, instead of waiting for an issue (such as mould) to arise. In two of the ten properties, new ventilation systems were installed as high humidity was detected. Similarly, the detection of high humidity and temperature with the boiler off in one other property led to the detection of a tumble-dryer being vented back into the property for free heat. Intervening to prevent this thus preventing future mould risk. Flagship believes that this preventative approach will save them over £600,000 in the next 10 years, without factoring in the increase in productivity generated by Switchee's analytics.

In three of the other properties, Switchee's messaging function was used to suggest measures on how to prevent other maintenance risks. During the Deben Road trial there was an increase from 15% to 70% resident communication through digital channels (email & SMS).



A Flagship resident with her new switchee freshly installed



A Flagship installer fitting the Switchee boiler controller

Following the success of the Deben Road trial; Flagship are installing a further 500 Switchee units to benefit from these outcomes on a larger scale. As well as driving proactive maintenance in a wider range of properties, phase 2 of this trial will also enable Flagship to utilise Switchee's remote boiler performance reporting & testing function and abandonment alerts. This will help identify faulty boilers prior to the heating season preventing an onrush of callouts during the first cold snap. Meanwhile, the abandonment alerts identify unused properties, enabling Flagship to re-commission them as soon as possible, helping avoid rent arrears.

ABOUT FLAGSHIP GROUP

Flagship are based in Norwich and manage over 22,500 homes across the East of England, have a turnover of £119-£120m and employ over 800 people. Flagship are one of the most technologically forward-thinking housing associations in the country; they have trialled a range of IoT products to improve the lives of their residents.

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