



# CIVICA

## Case Study

comino



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Group ICT Manager  
at PLUS Housing Group

## PLUS Housing Group reaches goals with help from Comino

PLUS Housing Group is an organisation willing to challenge, change and innovate. With partnership at its heart, PLUS Group selected public sector IT specialist Comino to help reengineer working practices, improve services and lay the foundations ready for future growth.

Comino's Universal Housing system, including electronic document management, workflow and contact management, has enabled PLUS Housing Group to streamline processes and cut costs to meet performance targets set out in the Efficiency Agenda, and aim for a three star Audit Commission rating.

### Profile

PLUS Housing Group is an alliance of independent organisations with complementary goals that have come together to make a positive contribution to the housing and regeneration sector. Member organisations include CDS Housing Association, Hornby Homes, New Gen, and INclude Neighbourhood Regeneration Company.

Operational in 2003, PLUS Housing Group owns and manages 8,850 units in seven local authority areas and employs 236 staff. A Housing Corporation Development Partner, PLUS is the lead housing association in two major areas of the Merseyside Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder (NewHeartlands).

### Growth, Quality and Efficiency

PLUS Housing Group has a definitive mission and vision, stating that by March 2007 it will have:

- Doubled its 2003 turnover
- Achieved three stars from the Audit Commission
- Gained 'green lights' in all its Housing Corporation Assessment areas.

Ian Cresswell, Group ICT Manager at PLUS Housing Group, comments, "We had several challenges that needed to be addressed, from everyday running issues that a housing organisation has to



deal with, through to expanding the business via merger and stock transfer while attracting and servicing tenants."

In 2003, PLUS Housing Group realised that its current IT system would be unable to meet the requirements of the business going forward. Staff within the Group were keen to utilise technology such as electronic document management, workflow and CRM. There was also a need to deploy handheld technology into repairs operations and enable tenants to access services over the web.

Cresswell states, "Ultimately, we realised we not only had to look for the right technology, but also revolutionise the way we work to satisfy our long term objectives; growth, quality and efficiency."



*The system will ensure we can adapt to any changes, bring in other organisations, so we can grow. It will make us information-centric, improving the quality of our customer service and cut out all our inefficiencies so that the system is working for us.*

Ian Cresswell,  
Group ICT Manager  
at PLUS Housing Group



comino

A Civica Group Company

Comino plc  
Vanguard House,  
Dewsbury Road,  
Leeds, LS11 5DD  
Telephone: 0113 244 1404  
Facsimile: 0113 244 0835  
E-mail:  
marketing@comino.com  
[www.comino.com](http://www.comino.com)

### Clear Winner

PLUS Housing Group knew it needed a long term, strategic partner with the technical expertise and proven track record in the industry to take it to a three star housing association.

Ten suppliers completed a comprehensive evaluation with 100 end-users at PLUS Housing Group and, as Cresswell explains, "Comino's Universal Housing solution scored double that of its nearest competition in our tests on usability and functionality. We knew we wanted a solution that would satisfy all of our business objectives and a partnership that would generate massive efficiencies. Comino was the clear winner."

The Comino solution provides PLUS Housing Group with a solid yet flexible transactional database foundation, an electronic document, workflow and contact management system that streamlines procedures, with skills recognition and automatic task routing that is fully integrated with the telephony system. It is a system to completely remove the reliance on paper-based processes.

### Process, Process, Process

Comino and PLUS Housing Group conducted a full business process reengineering exercise in order to evaluate and redo processes as necessary. "We refused to simply install a new system to copy our existing processes," states Cresswell. "It was never going to be a new for old implementation. We wanted new for new. It was important to spend time on this part of the project and get it right."

The changeover is being implemented in stages across the Group. CDS Housing was the first to be completely moved over to the Comino system, including working with handheld technology and having direct electronic links with partner contractors.

Cresswell explains, "All orders, completions, and invoices, are now handled electronically, which is much more cost effective and has driven up efficiencies automatically. Each completed action is moved on to the next step in the process and work continues without a break in the chain or a delay to wait for paperwork. As we deal with several thousand contract supplier actions per week, this system has made an enormous difference."

The Comino implementation challenged the way PLUS Housing Group worked and the required transformation was initially underestimated. "It got under the skin of how we worked and changed many of our day to day functions and processes, which took longer for staff to adjust than we had anticipated," states Cresswell.

However, rising to the challenge has ultimately set the foundations and the standards of a working environment that PLUS Housing Group can add to in the future, bolt on modules and continually improve the way it works.

Cresswell expands, "No-one expects 100 per cent take-up of a new system straight away; it took about three to four months to really bed-in, but after that the staff absolutely love it, and that is no time to wait for the long term benefits the system brings to the organisation."

### Aiming for the stars

PLUS Housing Group received two stars with promising prospects for improvement from the Audit Commission. Services delivered by the Group were found to be accessible and responsive to tenants' needs. The aim is for the Group to achieve three stars at the next inspection at the end of 2007.

CDS Housing has been live with Comino for 12 months and it has revolutionised working practices. All paper files have been removed and, even though it's a system primarily for housing, other areas of the business, such as human resources, are realising the benefits. "It's not just an IT system," comments Cresswell. "It is a way of working that streamlines processes, improves accuracy and speed and cuts costs to meet performance and efficiency targets."

Service staff at CDS Housing are now equipped to handle each and every query received effectively and efficiently; many of which can now be resolved, to the customer's satisfaction, at the very first point of contact.

"Comino will help us meet our long term objectives," explains Cresswell. "The system will ensure we can adapt to any changes, bring in other organisations, so we can grow. It will make us information-centric, improving the quality of our customer service and cut out all our inefficiencies so that the system is working for us."

### Looking to the future

The future looks set to be customer centric for all public sector organisations. Facilities such as call centres will become common place as they have in the private sector. PLUS is a dynamic group, alive to the market trends and fundamental changes taking place in housing and regeneration. "The software we have from Comino and the processes we have mapped will allow us to move into a true customer oriented one stop shop," concludes Cresswell.