

UNLOCKING FINANCIAL CAPACITY THROUGH BUSINESS ASSURANCE



City West Housing Trust is a not-for-profit registered provider of affordable housing. The trust owns and manages around 14,600 properties across Salford in the north west of England. It places its customers at the heart of everything it does and strives to raise standards within its communities and the local area by re-investing all profits back into improving living standards.

A transfer organisation, City West has experienced significant change from its council roots and during this time has also experienced some major health and safety challenges.

With ambitious plans - the trust plans to spend in excess of £235 million over the next five years on improving existing housing stock, whilst further developing its corporate culture - City West needed to generate efficiencies and have compliance certainty from its built assets and operations to help underpin its future plans and corporate vision.

“I appreciate your pragmatic and solution focused approach...and the way you buy into City West’s ‘can do, will do’ attitude. I feel that the approach adopted has been pitched just right.”

Lisa Scully - Assistant Director of Business Assurance, City West

Creating Solutions

EC Harris was appointed to provide Business Assurance services, focusing specifically on health and safety, in response to the executive board’s concerns that its compliance management system was no longer sufficiently robust to support the modern, dynamic approach of the organisation.

We undertook a number of actions to achieve City West’s aims. Initially, an in-depth workshop was undertaken to get under the skin of the organisation and ensure its current situation and aims were fully understood.

We then filled a vacant post on an interim basis with one of our own health and safety managers; providing pragmatic and proactive leadership across City West’s entire operation during the review period. This was crucial to provide immediate assurance for the executive board.

“We have got a better outcome than we could have imagined. We will save on our annual budgets and you can’t put a price on peace of mind.”

Lisa Scully - Assistant Director of Business Assurance, City West

Once these initial steps had been taken and a sense of improved peace-of-mind created, we then led an in-depth business assurance gap and an ‘investment versus incident avoided’ analysis, to determine the suitability of the existing compliance management systems and to identify the measures that needed to be taken to achieve the required business assurance. Recommendations from these reports were then made to the executive board and the project moved into the implementation phase.

The project team then designed a bespoke strategy and business assurance system that ‘fitted’ the organisation’s dynamic culture by using a series of uniquely applied tools driven from a market leading ‘risk profiling’ technique. The impact of this approach was to give immediate visibility to City West’s priority risks, by activity and head of service.

The risk profiling exercise provided clarity on where intervention was most likely to achieve the greatest benefit and where continued vigilance would be needed. The risk profiles themselves gave the same information, in a simpler form to each individual head of service of what was effectively 75% of the existing Health and Safety Management System. This reduction in bureaucracy, simplification of information and visibility of key risk was a critical element of the transformation of the health and safety function to better reflect the wider organisational culture.

From the risk profiling work, the team was able to develop appropriate ‘responsibility, accountability, consulted and informed’ matrices (RACI) which communicated clearly the role each person played in both maintaining existing control measures relevant to their own risk, but also where their interaction with other heads, teams and functions would ensure that duplication of effort was avoided. All risks were owned and controlled, those most able to effect risk were identified and communicated with and a consistent and uniform approach was taken. Together the risk profiling and RACI promoted the effectiveness of teams as opposed to the previous strict adherence / single line accountability approach.

Adding Value

By altering the reliance on a dependency culture and instead empowering existing teams to support the ownership of issues within City West, a number of roles needed to change internally as a consequence.

We facilitated this restructuring process and helped City West to recruit highly skilled individuals (both internally and externally) to deliver its new approach. This process led to significant efficiencies; as the overall cost of internal compliance was reduced.

Through the simplification, reconstruction and centralisation of compliance related processes, we also reduced compliance related hours for the senior management team and the executive board by 20%. Freeing them up to spend more time on strategic initiatives to improve business and deliver better community outcomes.

We advised City West on the most appropriate way to spend its health and safety training budgets. Helping them to target spend where it will have the biggest impact. It is estimated this will save City West a further £70,000 annually.

City West has been delighted with the strategy and the new compliance system. The new, simpler, dynamic approach is more cost effective to apply, will help underpin the delivery of its strategic vision and should assure the safety of tenants going forward.

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