

HOMES AND COMMUNITIES AGENCY

The Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) is the national housing and regeneration agency for England, with an annual investment budget of more than £5bn. The HCA was formed on 1 December 2008 through the transfer of the functions and assets of English Partnerships; the investment functions of the Housing Corporation; a number of delivery programmes from Communities and Local Government and the transfer of the Academy for Sustainable Communities.

The Homes and Communities Agency is a non-departmental public body and their sponsor government department is Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

<http://www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/>

HCA is achieving local ambitions

Working with local partners, HCA use skills and investment in housing and regeneration to meet the needs of local communities; creating new affordable homes and thriving places.

PROJECT REQUIREMENT AND SCOPE

Affordable Homes Programme (AHP)

The Affordable Homes Programme 2011-15 (AHP) aims to increase the supply of new affordable homes in England.

HCA Investment Partners and prospective partners were invited to submit offers for £2.2bn of funding (out of the overall £4.5bn funding pot) for affordable housing during the 2011-15 Spending Review period.

HCA needed a facility to process the AHP Standard Offer spreadsheets used by potential providers of Affordable Homes to bid for funding. These spreadsheets were to be stored in an Oracle Database to allow for analysis and reporting of the information via Business Objects and to manage Offers until evaluation of all offers is completed ready for Ministerial Submission of the 'Agreed Position'.

The import process needed to be live within 6 weeks, which was the deadline for Offer submissions. STCS worked with the customer to define business processes for the new programme as well as requirements for the IT system to support that process. We then developed and delivered the IT system on time, within budget and above customer expectations.

FirstBuy - Boost for first time buyers

FirstBuy is a new product in the Government's HomeBuy range designed to assist first time buyers into home ownership. It is expected to assist over 10,000 purchasers to buy a new home over the next two years.



“Fantastic job guys. Following, as it does, hot on the heels of AHP data imports/reporting, this has been a landmark couple of weeks for STCS. Your reputations have never been higher.”

**Head of IT Service Development
Homes and Communities Agency**

FirstBuy is part of the Government's wider proposals to boost growth by simultaneously stimulating demand, tackling supply-side barriers and supporting local priorities for supply. FirstBuy is aimed at maintaining capacity in the housebuilding industry in the short-term while assisting deposit constrained first time buyers to realise their homeownership aspirations.

HCA needed a system very similar to that for AHP Standard Offer to process FirstBuy Submissions spreadsheets, storing them in an Oracle database to allow for analysis and reporting of the information via Business Objects. There was an additional requirement to automatically evaluate the submission based upon pre-defined criteria and produce an overall score.

Using our previous experience in this area STCS were able to reuse much of the business processing, concepts and IT system functionality to develop a system and make it live within two weeks.

STCS delivered the system ahead of time, within budget, absorbing a number of additional requirements into the original budget and timescales, and exceeding customer's expectations.

STCS have enabled HCA to assess over 130 bids for funding from developers. The result is that £180m has been made available to over 100 housing associations, major house builders and smaller local firms across the country. The Agency's target to deliver 10,000 new homes has been exceeded well under budget.

TECHNICAL APPROACH

These projects required the development of a new database, new screens, an excel import processes and the provision of a business object universes.

The business processing and user requirements for the system needed to be investigated and specifications consisting of screen designs, process diagrams, and a narrative description of requirements were agreed with the client.

The spreadsheets were analysed to develop the necessary data model and confirm the business requirements.

After analysis the database and application changes were developed using an Oracle Forms application framework provided for other applications at HCA.

A Business Objects Universe was also developed.

There were several complexities/difficulties in this project. In particular:

- Multiple versions of excel spreadsheets, all differing slightly and been delivered from the developer in no particular order.
- Lack of control and validation within the spreadsheets.
- Extremely tight deadlines.

- The need to develop the systems whilst the customer was still in the process of defining the business model for the new Programmes.
- Managing workload with multiple other high-priority projects and ongoing system support.

KEY TECHNOLOGIES USED

The system has been built using the following technologies:

- Oracle Database 11g R2
- Oracle Forms 11g
- Business objects XI R3.1
- Windows Server 2008 R2
- Windows Citrix Servers