

# Case Study

Dorset Software: driving transparency and accountability across government

## Wandsworth Borough Council



The Housing Department of Wandsworth Borough Council operates a 24/7 emergency control room to provide centralised monitoring of incidents that occur in and around Wandsworth.

### Solution Snapshot

Dorset Software developed an incident tracking solution that would leverage existing information systems and infrastructure, minimise the re-entry of data, automate email notifications, report on incident levels and provide comprehensive information and statistics to management.

### Key Benefits

- The solution reduces the re-entry of data, boosting efficiency
- Extensive management information and statistics are provided by the system
- Modular construction allows functionality to develop alongside requirements
- Ensures reliable operation of key incident reporting features, regardless of connectivity
- Real-time reporting allows a clear overview of ongoing incidents
- Automated reports smooth the change of shifts

*"SITREP has exceeded our expectations. The system has proven to be much better than we ever imagined it would."*

Kevin Hayter, IT Project Manager, Wandsworth Borough Council

### The Challenge

Wandsworth Council Housing Department realised that to be able to respond to the growing need for management information and statistics from Central Government, enhance the visibility of incidents and provide comprehensive emergency services, it needed to replace its ageing combination of systems with a single efficient application.

After initial research identified that an off-the-shelf package would not meet Wandsworth's needs, a specification for a bespoke software solution was drawn up and subsequently put out to tender. A pressing time constraint of seven months was placed on both Wandsworth Borough Council and Dorset Software.

### The Solution

A key area of functionality in the new system, SITREP, is to allow addresses entered by the control officers to be cross referenced with three other external systems. The integration is achieved by accessing external databases directly where possible but also by taking scheduled downloads of complete data on a regular basis.

Incident responses are also logged using SITREP. In depth analysis of the response times and actions performed at the scene is possible through SITREP reports. Information screens, continuously updated, allow management users to get an overall picture of control room activity.

### The Benefits

Increases in productivity have been evident: More and better information is now readily available, enabling the council to quickly and accurately respond to Central Government's changing needs for statistics and information.

The increased availability of information also offers enhanced visibility to aid management decision-making. The reliability of the solution is also paramount: Dorset Software has ensured that SITREP is always available to help provide emergency response to borough incidents. The solution is capable of not only solving current problems but also of facilitating the growth requirements of the council.



DORSET SOFTWARE

## Introduction

To manage and monitor incidents, Wandsworth Borough Council has a dedicated Emergency Control Room. Operating within the Housing Department, the Wandsworth Emergency Control (WEC) has the responsibility of taking incoming calls from Borough Citizens in relation to incidents in the Borough, arranging a response and tracking resolution. Incidents can relate to lift trappings in council housing, noise complaints, clean up operations and even terrorist activity.

## The Challenge

Utilising outdated and disparate systems in the WEC, IT Project Manager Kevin Hayter realised that to improve productivity through increasing the availability of information and statistics, and to enhance visibility of incidents, responses and response times, a new solution had to be found. Initial research highlighted that an off-the-shelf package was not readily available to meet Wandsworth's unique needs and that customisation of an off-the-shelf package was prohibitive in terms of cost.

*"Management likes the fact that it can get more information out of the system and now relies heavily on SITREP to provide the necessary statistics and information."*

Kevin Hayter, IT Project Manager, Wandsworth Borough Council

Wandsworth, therefore, opted for a bespoke solution, which would match its exact requirements and offer better value. A specification for a bespoke software solution, based upon the functionality available in the current systems and incorporating managements' and users' wishes for a future solution, was drawn up and put out to tender.

In response to the tender, Dorset Software was selected by Wandsworth to produce the bespoke solution. From the outset time constraints were placed upon the Council and Dorset Software, with just 7 months until the new WEC was due to go live.

## Methodology

An ISO 9001 and a TickIT certified corporation, Dorset Software follows strict procedures in developing bespoke software solutions, which meant that it could guarantee to develop a solution to meet the exact requirements of Wandsworth, delivered on time and to budget.

The first stage of the process involved a design session where Kevin Hayter, the IT Project Manager and a senior Control Room Officer met with a team from Dorset Software to discuss the exact requirements for the bespoke solution. A prototype was shown to the representatives of Wandsworth and a deeper discussion of users' and managements' needs followed.

Having an experienced user at the design sessions meant that it was easy to cover typical scenarios and understand problems with the current system to ensure that all outcomes were considered. Just three months after being awarded the tender, Dorset Software delivered the first version of the bespoke solution, Secure Incident Tracking Emergency Program (SITREP) for user testing. Testing and bug fixing followed and the final solution was delivered in plenty of time for the launch of the WEC.

## SITREP Functionality

A key area of SITREP functionality is to allow addresses entered by the control officers to be cross referenced with three other external systems; the council tenant register, a list of known aggressive persons and a third party postcode lookup. The integration is achieved by accessing external databases directly where possible but also by taking scheduled downloads of complete data on a regular basis.

This technique allows SITREP to operate satisfactorily even if external systems fail. Though not part of the original specification this Communications Failure Module has since been developed by Dorset Software. Management sees this as a priority, so even if there is a major failure, all incidents are logged locally.

With the external interfaces in place call logging is performed rapidly and with confidence that any critical information about the caller or location of the incident is transmitted clearly to the operator. Incident responses are also logged using SITREP. In depth analysis of the response times and actions performed at the scene is possible through the SITREP reports and represents a significant enhancement to the operation of the control room.

Information screens, continuously updated, allow management users to get an overall picture of control room activity. These screens also keep all the SITREP users up-to-date on the progress of large scale incidents, especially important at the change of shift. When the shift changes in the control room detailed Incident Reports are sent by email to all the relevant departments in the council.



Dorset Software has assisted Wandsworth Borough Council to respond swiftly to emerging incidents.

## Technology Snapshot

The desktop application solution was developed using Microsoft .NET technologies connecting to a central Microsoft SQL Server database.

## The Benefits

SITREP has allowed Wandsworth to leverage its existing information systems and, therefore, reduce the re-entry of data. SITREP has already had a great effect upon the productivity of the Council in terms of the provision of statistics and information.

The flexibility and adaptability of the solution are already proving a hit, particularly with the changing pressures that are placed upon public sector organisations. Kevin adds "We are very impressed that the solution can be developed to add in more modules; as the requirements placed upon the Council change, so can the functionality of the system." Kevin elaborates "There are even a couple of things in the system that we hadn't considered; the Dorset Software team added them in using its experience."

As for the future of SITREP, Kevin sees the role of and the reliance upon SITREP growing. "It is absolutely a key part of Wandsworth Housing Department's Emergency Response." New modules are already under development and plans for even more are afoot.