

OnDemand Resource helps North Lincolnshire Council

Reducing Adult Social Care financial assessment backlog



Increasing backlog was a problem for the Council and its service users

In 2016, North Lincolnshire Council was struggling to keep on top of its Adult Social Care financial assessments because of resourcing challenges driven by a combination of sickness, holidays and the departure of key individuals. By the middle of the year the delay in completing assessments had increased to more than 12 weeks, which in turn meant the Council wasn't able to charge customers and bring in revenue for over three months. Service users, meanwhile, were unhappy about the length of time it was taking for financial assessments to be completed.

Experienced financial assessment officers are in short supply

North Lincolnshire recognised that they could only eliminate the backlog by recruiting, but attracting experienced staff from outside the area proved difficult. Hiring people with no experience was not a viable option as that would mean taking existing staff away from their jobs to train them, which would further increase the backlog. The Council approached several temp agencies but none could provide staff with Adult Social Care financial assessment knowledge or experience.

OnDemand staff cleared the backlog and freed up time to improve the system's efficiency

Civica has a pool of experienced Adult Social Care financial assessment personnel which are available on demand to process assessments. North Lincolnshire asked Civica to help deal with its assessment backlog. Within two weeks of getting in touch with Civica, their OnDemand personnel were up and running, working through the backlog of assessments for North Lincolnshire.

That was in October 2016. Since then Civica has provided additional financial assessment support, enabling the backlog that had built up since the beginning of the year to be eliminated within nine weeks (more than 417 financial assessments were processed in that period). Civica also ensured the correct information was applied to financial assessments by using the Department for Work and Pension's Customer Information System (CIS) data, an added bonus for North Lincolnshire as the council didn't have access to the CIS at that time.

"Financial assessments for Adult Social Care is a niche business. We contacted a number of agencies but none of them could provide any staff with financial assessment knowledge or experience."

David Jackson
Resources and Transformation
Manager, North Lincolnshire Council

North Lincolnshire Council's Resources and Transformation Manager David Jackson believes that Civica was able to clear the backlog so quickly because the staff were immediately able to understand council policies and procedures as well as get to grips with their IT systems. He also notes that because Civica staff are experienced at processing financial assessments within the rules of the Care Act, "the outputs of the financial assessments have been very high quality." Initially, the Council checked all of Civica's work but when it became clear that accuracy was very high, that dropped back to checking just one in three. The Council has never raised any issues or concerns with the quality of Civica's output.

Experienced officers help maximise income

Bringing Civica in has proved to be highly cost effective for two reasons. Firstly, Civica's financial assessments officers are skilled in means-tested benefits, so they've been able to help maximise income for North Lincolnshire by identifying whether a customer needed to claim any additional benefits. These additional benefits help fund the cost of their care and support - and in turn increase the contribution payable to the local authority. Secondly, the cost of the OnDemand Resource has been offset by financial gains generated by eliminating the backlog.

Enabling a more efficient structure and process

North Lincolnshire Council is restructuring its internal team in order to increase efficiency and bolster its ability to keep on top of the workload going forward. Using OnDemand Resource from Civica to support them during its transition, has meant service levels have been maintained and helped them to be more efficient — therefore avoiding the need to recruit more full-time team members.

The Council has also picked up a few other ideas from the experienced Civica personnel who have worked with them. They have identified some practices that are more long-winded than necessary, presenting the opportunity to simplify and speed up processes. Currently, for example, they insist on having a signed declaration from each customer, which is not strictly necessary. This merely slows the assessment process and lengthens the customer payment time. Civica also spotted that some elements of the assessments were being carried out manually by Council staff when those processes could be automated by the system, if it was correctly configured.

So overall, as well as clearing the backlog, its partnership with Civica has given the Council the time and opportunity to train their own team on new aspects of their system while OnDemand staff have maintained service levels.

"It's been cost neutral, as writing off debts from unpaid contributions have fallen as customers are notified of the assessment in a timely manner. We've also seen increased income due to the quick turnaround of assessments, informing the customer of their charge/contribution payable. The number of debtor days has reduced as well."

**David Jackson, Resources and Transformation Manager,
North Lincolnshire Council**

- ▶ Council was provided with skilled staff dedicated to their needs
- ▶ Backlog removed within nine weeks
- ▶ High quality assessments provided with high levels of accuracy
- ▶ Increased speed of collection meant it was a cost neutral exercise
- ▶ Reduction in customer complaints
- ▶ Freed up time for the Council to make long term improvements to the system

"Civica's financial assessment officers are highly experienced and had the expertise to hit the ground running. They gave our team confidence in the work they deliver. The Civica team has expert knowledge of our financial system and were able to adapt their skills and knowledge around our local rules and policies, taking into account the regulations of the Care Act."

Stuart Towse
Financial Support Manager,
North Lincolnshire Council