ASTER
GROUP

Standardised processes at Aster Group

Results & ROI
- Identified cost savings of £200k across the Group
- Increased error-proofing and mistake-proofing throughout the processes
- Streamlined and standardised processes with duplication and other wastes removed

The client

Aster Group is a successful group of businesses delivering a range of services in southern and southwest England within social housing and care provision. Aster were developing their approach to using Lean Thinking and identified service recharges as an area to improve added value. As Ad Esse had already helped Aster successfully in developing a new approach to Communications, they asked for our support.

The challenge

Recharges is a complex and crosscutting area that involves tenancy management, voids, lettings, repairs and customer accounts. There was no single process and a high level of variation across sites, teams and individuals. Data was inconsistent and difficult to extract making the judging of performance difficult and imprecise. A review of recharges was needed to gather an understanding of the input, and impact, different teams had in relation to recharges and provide a clear of view of how recharges were truly performing. The project also needed to deliver efficiency savings as well as create a 'firm but fair' reputation for the Aster Group, thus setting a clear precedent for collection.

The approach

The recharges review began in a pilot area which was to be followed by a rollout across the Group. The first stage of the pilot was the diagnostic, which led to the following key findings:

- Accountability for recharges unclear and process not standardised or aligned with system workflows
- A lack of clear focus or activities identified to prevent recharges
- Recharge repairs identified not being recharged in the majority of cases
- Repairs recharges were not all being logged and so potential for recharge income was unknown
- Voids recharge process was disjointed focusing on the decision to recharge, not recovery

Once the problems with the existing process were understood workshops with key stakeholders were held to redesign repairs, voids and mutual exchange processes using the following principles:

- One policy that covers recharges across all Aster Companies with an end-to-end process
- Record all repairs with a recharge
- Make a decision that it is a recharge early and pursue it
- Use all opportunities to pursue a debt when the customer is a current tenant

The group also developed a process to identify damage or neglect from the customer and put in place procedures to notify them to fix the problem and avoid a recharge or if not, then Aster undertake the work and recharge the customer. An improvement plan was then developed with actions, schedule for completion, corresponding measures and benefits to ensure that the improvements were implemented

The benefits

- A process that outlines tenant responsibilities to maintain their home from day one
- Improved use of activities already in place e.g. visits to identified damage and neglect and to give the tenant opportunities to put it right with Aster support
- Defined end-to-end process providing clarity on roles and responsibilities to enable recharge recovery
- Joint working between Aster Properties, Aster Communities and Synergy Housing to improve performance promoting further process improvement in the future
- Clear and aligned objectives across different teams, with an emphasis on preventing recharges
- Clear accountabilities and responsibilities for all relevant teams
- A plan for roll out across the Group

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