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The City of Edinburgh Council implements an online booking system to manage block contracts gaining a 31% increase in bed occupancy rates

Respite, or short break, care is a key priority for many Local Authorities working towards the preventative agenda, yet many Local Authorities suffer from large under-utilisation of block contracted provision with occupancy rates of just over 50% being commonplace. This results in wasted funds with purchased provision not being used and clients missing out on care services.

For The City of Edinburgh Council, the ability to maximise use of block contracted short break care beds is a key objective and at the beginning of 2007 a programme of improvement was embarked upon.

Through implementing a robust online booking and management system suitable care is now located and allocated much faster, cancelled beds are rebooked and detailed market intelligence is gleaned to inform future commissioning strategies.

This has led to significant efficiencies, with £137,000 worth of care beds that were previously being lost through cancellation now being rebooked and further efficiencies being made in staff time and communication.

The background

Listed as a World Heritage site, Edinburgh is a beautiful and prosperous city with a population of 448,624.

The City of Edinburgh Council provides a number of services for older people. These range from services within the community including home care and day care, to long term residential care. In line with the Scottish Executive drive to widen the availability of short break care to benefit carers and care recipients, the Council also provides short breaks through a number of block contracts with trusted providers.

The Council manages the booking process via a brokerage system, with social workers in the field referring client's needs into a central brokerage team called STARRT.

The challenge

Like many Local Authorities, The City of Edinburgh faced a number of challenges in the management of these block contracts and in particular were suffering with a high rate of bookings being cancelled with very late notice or after the care package was due to begin or even, in some cases, after the care period had ended.

Therefore The City of Edinburgh Council sought a solution to track, monitor, commission and report on the usage of their short break block contracts. In particular the Council required a cost-effective system to help them rebook cancelled beds, relieve pressure on waiting lists, and bring forward the delivery of much needed services. The key objective was to ensure that occupancy levels were maintained at a much higher level whilst keeping a degree of flexibility in available services.

Catriona Lyon, Planning and Commissioning Officer at City of Edinburgh Council, explains, "At the City of Edinburgh Council we identified that our short break occupancy levels were low. Not only was it essential to make the best use of available care beds, it was also important to ensure a high standard of care of the population. In order to keep some flexibility in availability it seemed to us that an occupancy rate of around 90% should be the target to aim for."



The solution

As an existing customer of OLM Group, The City of Edinburgh Council already used CareSearch (previously known as BEDVACS) to gain immediate access to real-time detailed information about vacancies within all registered care homes in the area.

The Council turned to OLM's online CareBooking system to help them manage their short break block contracts, as Catriona Lyon explains, "We had a need for a robust and accessible system in order to increase the use of short break facilities. We already used OLM's CareSearch service so it was a logical step for us to use CareBooking to help manage our short-break commissioning. The new system saves us time and helps towards our goal of maximising occupancy levels."

Applied in conjunction with CareSearch, CareBooking provides The City of Edinburgh Council with the unrivalled ability to manage the whole local care market, both now and in the future. The flexible e-booking solution assists

staff at the Council with online reservation, booking and cancellation facilities including automatic communication with both providers and referring social workers.

A detailed reporting centre provides information on items such as unmet need, potential cost of unmet need, reasons for unused beds and actual cost of unused beds. This assists the Council with their future commissioning strategies.

Easy-to-use, the display and functionality is tailored to The City of Edinburgh Council's unique needs and, as the system is hosted remotely, there is no impact on the IT infrastructure. Internet access is all that is required to use the system and create a real-time, interactive, shared, clearing-house for bookings and information that eliminates the risk of duplicated placements or unintended bed vacancies. The online booking of services also means that placements happen quickly and an information trail is captured.

Benefits of Care Booking for The City of Edinburgh Council:

- Increased occupancy levels
- 70% of cancelled beds rebooked
- Savings of £137,240 per year through filling vacant beds
- Time savings
- Ability to monitor and analyse performance

clients' requirements is cross-referenced against particulars of referring agencies and care home providers to create a time-saving and cost-effective solution to managing requests for care.

Catriona Lyon comments, "Our occupancy levels have increased demonstrating the benefits of having a central database and matching service. Much of this increase has been as a result of filling cancelled beds. Although 33% of booked beds were cancelled, 70% of these beds were subsequently rebooked, which is equal to 5.56 beds per night. This has prevented the council wasting the equivalent of £376 per night or £137,240 per year through vacant beds."

The benefits

Due to the database and matching functionality of the solution, the major benefit that The City of Edinburgh Council has secured is the ability to fill cancelled beds.

"We can now manage care beds more efficiently which creates benefits in terms of costs and using resources effectively. The graphical data and reports generated from the database are also very useful. We are able to produce a range of reports, for instance reasons for cancellation, reasons for unmet need, cost of unoccupied beds and so on. This feature also allows the council to monitor and analyse the utilisation, delivery and administration of all our commissioned care services. Therefore we are reassured that people at the high end of need are getting the services they need," explains Catriona Lyon.

Catriona continues, "Our successful application of the solution demonstrates how CareBooking is ultimately changing the way we manage our care bed provision.

CareBooking matches potential clients in Edinburgh that may be suitable for an empty bed based on requirements defined by individual client information. Detailed information on

Looking forward

CareBooking has already delivered essential information regarding usage which has helped with the planning of future services at Edinburgh, and the council will continue to ascertain ways to improve existing practices. Catriona explains, "Through improvements to the CareSearch service provided by OLM we are looking to provide carers with further care home information, for instance, providing access to personalised directories of care that highlight the choice of providers available."

With the front end resource directory functionality available through CareSearch and the online booking and communication functionality of CareBooking OLM is looking to deploy this flexible and scaleable solution in other areas, such as children's services, supporting people services and even home care.

In the future, it is also envisaged that these services can be utilised to help people with purchasing their care choices through the Self Directed Support initiatives such as Individual Budgets. Currently these services can be used by people purchasing their respite care choices through Self Directed Support (known as Direct Payments). The further promotion of Individual Budgets in Edinburgh will enhance the flexible respite and short break outcomes that users can achieve. This development will be fully in line with Guidance on Respite and Short Breaks, recently issued by the Scottish Government.



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