

Case Study: Warwickshire County Council



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Warwickshire County Council Demonstrates ROI of Field Based Technology

Graham Miles, Operations Project Manager at Warwickshire County Council

“By approaching highway maintenance from a more strategic perspective Warwickshire County Council has achieved an ROI of £140,000 efficiency savings in one year with the introduction of field based technology.”

Warwickshire County Council Demonstrates Return on Investment of Public Spending on the Region’s Road Network Through Field Based Technology...

Over the past decade UK Local Authorities have faced increasing pressure to improve levels of service and deliver higher quality, safer roads and infrastructure to their citizens. However, with money from the public purse always at a premium, many Councils have focused on undertaking a very reactive approach to remedial and safety work.

Yet by approaching highway maintenance from a more strategic perspective and investing in the underlying business processes to increase timeliness and quality of the data, Local Authorities can significantly improve the return-on-investment on public spending to achieve greater gains in efficiency. Many, like Warwickshire County Council, have achieved this by the introduction of field based technology, which has resulted in an ROI of £140,000 efficiency savings in year one.

Like all Councils, Warwickshire has a statutory responsibility to deliver safety inspections for thousands of miles of roads and paths on which they make informed, yet critical, judgements in order to prioritise fixes and remedial actions. Historically, this has been a paper based process that in some instances has resulted in delays in data getting into the planning process, but through innovative investment in Information Technology from Exor Corporation, Warwickshire is now at a stage where they are able to proactively plan and execute a strategy to bring faster, cheaper repairs to its highways network.

Complexity

The complexity within Warwickshire County Council is the fact that five area teams exist with twenty-two engineers tasked with locating and documenting potholes, signage damage/errors, safety barriers, road markings, footpaths, slabs, drainage issues and other potential defects. In addition to this there are also a further two mobile teams who inspect for safety critical defects.

As part of the Council’s Corporate IT strategy to adopt a more mobile and flexible working regime with the aim of improving Council-wide collaboration, Warwickshire made the strategic decision to build on its Asset Management System to provide a more flexible working system for its field based staff.

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Advanced Network Management Tools

Graham Miles, Operations Project Manager at Warwickshire County Council, explains, “Our core Asset Management System is an advanced network management tool that’s been specifically designed to provide us with the fundamental steps in functionality and usability to allow us to understand the condition of our entire road network. It provides us with one integrated platform to address our key business drivers which in turn allows us to disseminate information to citizens and key business stakeholders.”

“On a day-to-day level our asset management system allows the Team to access a variety of information in a single integrated way through one centralised database. We’re then able to tailor this to the individual’s personal requirements so they can see the highways data. All of this is done without compromising the integrity of the data for other users.”

“This has many advantages for us, but it was limited to our office based staff only, so we wanted to build on the core solution and extend the centralised repository of data so it could be assessable to our field based staff. By taking the system into the field users can see greater advantages across data sharing, data access and data accuracy.”

Improved Data Accuracy

Through the introduction of Exor’s field based defect and asset data collection module, Warwickshire County Council was able to improve data accuracy and time management of field based staff. Miles explains, “Loading the solution onto a number of mobile devices has proved to be highly successful in improving the accuracy of information coming into the system and allows us to focus more resource on other core areas of our day-to-day activities such as processing notifications and undertaking maintenance work.”

Engineers can now instantaneously zoom into a specific area of the road where they find a defect and record the fault using the standard sets of coding used in the system. At the end of each day this information is then transmitted using wireless technology directly into the highway network database and is loaded directly into Exor’s maintenance module. Shaun Fennings, Highways Management Information System (HMIS) Programme Manager says, “By relaying the information directly into the system as opposed to having to manually record the data out in the field and then physically input it, we significantly reduce the amount of duplication in the job. In turn, this results in significant time and cost savings, and enables us to improve our customer service and response times.”

Field Based Productivity

Exor offers engineers a method of collecting asset inventory information, such as the location and defect recording of every gully in a single County. Fennings adds, “By providing the Area Managers with a more compact means of accessing the software we have taken the first step towards mobilising the entirety of County Highways. With the Exor software now on mobile devices we are also able to capture and process far more of the non-safety specific information in the field, and have seen significant increases in our productivity as a result.”

Fennings continues, “In addition to the increased levels of data captured our use of the system offers us the ability to provide faster and better informed responses to consumers. In the coming months any information recorded by our call centre operatives will be visible on the mobile devices by our engineers. This enables them to check out any reported defects in the area more efficiently and provide updates to the member of the public who recorded the fault within a far shorter time frame.”

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Improve Levels of Service

Following the successful deployment of Exor Warwickshire County Council is considering applying the process across more of the assets associated with highways such as drainage. As Fennings concludes, "With the increasing pressure to improve levels of service and deliver higher quality, safer roads and infrastructure, Local Authorities have been struggling to find new methods to deliver greater return-on-investment from each tax payer's pound, and this is only set to increase."

"With the recommendations of the PITT report likely to be passed as an element of the Flooding & Water Bill as early as 2009 Councils will be under even greater pressure to monitor the assets associated with the roads such as gulleys and storm drains. However, by applying a similar reporting process to the one we are currently using to report faults across associated assets, we will be able to better plan our maintenance schedules to reduce public inconvenience as a result of extreme weather."

Warwickshire County Council achieved a commendation for its field based working practices, underpinned by Exor, from the County Surveyors Society 2008.

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