Meeting Mapping Requirements with GIS

One of the UKâ€™s largest housing and care organisations has decided to meet all its mapping requirements using geographic information systems (GIS) technology from the British software developer, Cadcorp.

With nearly 32,000 homes, Midland Heart is the largest provider operating in 54 local authorities across the Midlands area, with a stock portfolio that includes nearly 22,000 general needs properties; over 2,000 shared ownership homes and a significant care and support provision of nearly 6,500 units.

Housing associations continually have to balance the need to generate social as well as financial returns, noted James Jervis of Midland Heart. Geographic information systems technology helps the organisation to deliver against both sets of obligations. Although Midland Heart has been using GIS effectively for a number of years, its use was limited to a few specialist staff at Midland Heart who had desktop GIS software. Midland Heart recognised that if it were to allow all staff to visualise key internal and external datasets geographically, first a web-based application had to be employed.

Midland Heart invited a number of GIS software suppliers to propose an Intranet web mapping solution and, following an extensive evaluation, selected Cadcorp technology to provide the web mapping application. In addition, Cadcorp also was asked to replace Midland Heart's existing desktop GIS. The new, combined system will now manage the location of properties, Land Registry title polygons and land use data, against background datasets which will include OS OpenData and OS MasterMap.

There were two requirements that were not open for discussion. The first was that the web mapping application should be easy for staff to use. The second was that it should be convenient to administer without the need for external involvement. Cadcorp Web Map Layers met both of these requirements. Midland Heart did not set out to standardise on one GIS technology, James Jervis said. It was equally open to proposals for web mapping applications which would co-exist with its current desktop GIS. The company found that Cadcorp SIS technology would allow them to coexist in the short term, before migrating to a standardised infrastructure.

Mike O'Neil, CEO of Cadcorp, added that geographic information is central to the work of housing associations. He found it encouraging to see Midland Heart unlocking the value of that information by making it available to as many staff as possible.

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