



## Thorners Homes

### Best practice FrontLine implementation at a sheltered housing charity - One-in-the-eye for maintenance management professionals?

#### Background

Thorners Homes is a non-profit making charity which helps to support widows of limited income and means by providing them with subsidised housing. The Almshouse charity was formed in 1690 under a will left by local philanthropist Robert Thorne. It has 149 single occupancy flat units distributed over eight sites around Southampton.

Each fully serviced property has a kitchen, shower room, bedroom and lounge and, in addition, every site has its own guest rooms, common room, laundry room, maintenance stores, meter cupboards and so on. The total maintenance of all the properties is contracted out to various local trade contractors.

Managing this property portfolio to ensure everything is maintained in good order and that comprehensive due diligence records are kept of the assets - from the building fabric and utility services to fixtures, fittings and appliances - is a quite a task. In the commercial sector, responsibility would, in all likelihood, rest with a

professional Facilities Manager, supported by a Site Supervisor or Job Co-ordinator – and these individuals would assuredly have been appointed for their building trades experience and, most probably, all be men.

At Thorners Homes it's different! Here, the day-to-day maintenance management activities are overseen and directed by the Chief Executive, Marilyn Lodwick, and her small team of administrators. The all-woman team has no trade or maintenance training whatsoever - but they do have buckets of common sense, drive, organisational ability and the prudence and steely determination to manage their cash-constrained budget to the penny.

#### Needs

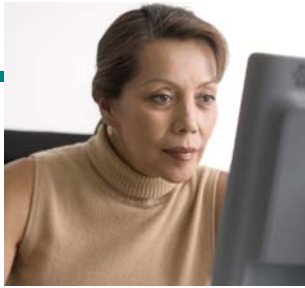
Thorners Homes was unhappy with the system they were using to co-ordinate maintenance activities – it was a paper-based, labour-intensive and extremely difficult to keep on top of things. They were convinced there had to be a better way - so they went shopping for it.

After researching the market, Marilyn Lodwick contacted Shire - just around the corner in Southampton - for a demonstration of FrontLine computerised maintenance management software. The Thorners Homes team listened to the benefits the software could bring and, having convinced themselves of its ease of use, ability to do everything they needed - and bargain price - decided that FrontLine was for them.

Marilyn Lodwick put the decision in a nutshell, "We chose FrontLine from Shire because it was very flexible and offered the most features for the least investment."

#### Solution

Marilyn Lodwick was looking for an easy-to-use, efficient and auditable maintenance system that could generate work orders, record costs and charges, keep an event history of each individual asset - including the date of acquisition and disposal - and generate performance reports. FrontLine fulfilled all these requirements.



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Members of the team attended a 3 day FrontLine implementation course at the Shire Learning Centre and then set about implementing the software themselves.

Marilyn Lodwick is delighted with FrontLine, “My very small team of administrators are using FrontLine with tremendous enthusiasm. They can record a variety of maintenance requests, issue work orders to contractors and lots more.” FrontLine keeps a record of

- Residents details
- Every flat, store room, guest room, etc
- Information regarding redecoration
- Individual assets within the sites: cookers, night storage heaters, under-floor heating, fan heaters, water cylinders, extractor fans and more
- Planners for routine servicing of appliances, etc
- Weekly work programmes for managers and staff

FrontLine automatically prompts the due dates of regulatory inspections

and tests and keeps a record of all test and inspect certificates. “In the recording of all this information we are complying with Health and Safety requirements”, Marilyn Lodwick remarked.

### Benefits

With the aid of FrontLine, Thorners Homes has saved time and gained better control of their property maintenance, whilst eliminating the stress and hassles that go along with paper-based systems.

Marilyn Lodwick can prove to the Charity and Housing Association that her properties are being efficiently run and clearly demonstrate the use of best practice to the Housing Corporation, Charity Commission, Local Government and the Trustees. She can sleep soundly knowing that the regulatory checks are up to date and everything's under control.

### Insight

This is an extraordinary FrontLine implementation!

Shire maintenance applications specialist, Chris Lee, is full of admiration, “The team at Thorners Homes can put many ‘professional’ maintenance departments to shame.

They picked up the system and ran with it. They populated it themselves and their data is well-structured. Returned data is accurate and complete and they can generate reports at the touch of a button.

It's a great FrontLine installation – one of the best – and the girls are always looking for new ways to improve their system. They keep in contact and take full advantage of the support and advice we offer.

This success story is one-in-the-eye for the maintenance managers who let their system gather dust while they navel gaze about maintenance strategy or whinge about their lack of time - these girls just got on with it!”

There's no mistaking the fact that Chris Lee is a big fan of Marilyn Lodwick and her team at Thorners Homes and it's easy to see why. ■