

Mid Sussex District Council maximise revenue with automated property finder and inspections software

Mid Sussex District Council is considered to be an affluent, rural area, with three main towns; Burgess Hill, Haywards Heath and East Grinstead and a lot of smaller surrounding villages. The Revenues and Benefits team are responsible for the collection of tax from around 70,000 council tax properties and 4,500 NNDR properties. Their primary responsibilities include supporting the revenues and benefits function, dealing with system administration, quality control, training, appeals and handling projects, particularly in relation to any software solutions which can help improve performance and drive revenue.

Identifying properties not currently liable for tax

It was just over a year ago that the Council decided to invest in NEXUS, a solution designed to automate the process of identifying properties not currently liable for business rates or council tax. The Council became aware of the solution having seen a press release and they subsequently received a test case prior to investing in NEXUS that revealed a new build property which they had no knowledge of and which was liable for council tax.

According to Elizabeth Marlow, Support Team Manager for Mid Sussex Revenues and Benefits *“the solution has more than paid for itself in the first year, we have had some really positive results from it. For three properties alone, we have managed to backdate billing by between 7 to 10 years that had been missed, they were larger properties as well, rated as Band G*

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The decision to invest in NEXUS was a no brainer, the cost was very reasonable, it easily makes the money back we invested in it, we are a very busy team and this solution does the work for us, we have avoided the need for having someone in full time to achieve the same outputs.

Elizabeth Marlow,
Team Manager for Mid Sussex Revenues
and Benefits

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Balcombe Viaduct

and H. One property was a new build, another was taken out of rating because it was two properties being merged into one and another was where the original property was demolished and two were built in its place and only one property was brought back into rating.”

Elizabeth goes on to say *“the decision to invest in NEXUS was a no brainer, the cost was very reasonable, it easily makes the money back we invested in it, we are a very busy team and this solution does the work for us, we have avoided the need for having someone in full time to achieve the same outputs.”*

Evidence to support missing properties

The reports on potential missing properties provided by the NEXUS business support team are thorough and detailed and in most instances have been sent straight to the Valuation office. There have only been a few occasions, where an Inspector might need to be sent out to further investigate the property and verify its status.

Since implementing the NEXUS solution last year, Mid Sussex have investigated 44 properties resulting in £88,000 amount of additional revenue so far, with 12 further bandings expected.



MID SUSSEX
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Maximising revenue opportunities with multi-solution investments

In addition to NEXUS, Mid Sussex also invested in the Destin Solutions, property inspection solution, Aspire in 2022 and since implementation have conducted over 11,000 property inspections. Prior to the implementation of Aspire, the Council used a paper-based system and had no real way of keeping a track of property developments and property visits. Moving forward these two solutions work well together as a means of keeping on top of local properties and maximising revenue opportunities.

Mid Sussex have two Property Inspectors and one Inspection Support Officer with Aspire predominantly being used to manage inspections coming from planning applications, deal with new developments and 'changes in use' of properties and to review empty NNDR properties.

Keeping on top of empty NNDR properties

Prior to the implementation of Aspire the Council had no way of keeping on top of reviewing their empty NNDR properties, something which was picked up on in an internal audit. Elizabeth comments *"using Aspire we now have a system in place which means every empty NNDR property is reviewed on an ongoing 3 month rolling basis and we can keep on top of changes to ratepayers. We were able to implement this quite quickly using Aspire and would not have been able to do this in the past without a lot of manual reporting and significant allocation of resource."*

Shared access and routing options

Planning decisions now get loaded into the Aspire system every week and decisions are made around whether to create visits or 'no action' these. Property Inspectors can proactively set up their visits for the week and know what their schedule is and this is shared with the Revenues and Benefits team who have access to the system. The Inspectors also have the option to set up automated routing to schedule their visits.

According to Elizabeth *"the main goal of using Aspire is to make sure we can monitor everything and that we have a documented decision for everything. The whole team can access Aspire and see at any point in time what visits have occurred and what the outcomes of those visits were. It is really useful for our admin support to be able to look at any area and see how many visits are due, set up future visits and also be able to create bulk loads of multiple inspections, rather than creating each visit one at a time."*

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Measuring performance

The Council are also benefiting from the ability to identify completed visits that had not been reported to the back office and which had no future visit date set, this is significantly reducing the chances of things being missed in the future. They are also using Aspire to provide feedback to the team on their performance, noting the number and types of visits done in any given timeframe, something which was previously unquantifiable.

Customisation of the property inspection solution

In relation to support and customer service experience, Elizabeth comments *"we have had loads of customisation requests to adapt Aspire to make it work more effectively for us and Destin have been brilliant, everything we have asked for has been implemented. Destin have a real can-do attitude, the service has been second to none. I don't think we have really experienced this attentiveness with many software suppliers, it is really refreshing, we have a really good working relationship and it makes all the difference."*

As part of the commitment to service, Destin have monthly calls scheduled with Mid Sussex to run through any new customisations or features to Aspire, revisit any features the team have not used in a while, identify any outstanding issues and generally brainstorm ideas on how to get the most out of the solution.