

SHINING A LIGHT ON SERVICES IN PLYMOUTH

ENCOURAGING RESULTS ARE REPORTED FROM A RECENT PROJECT BY PLYMOUTH CITY COUNCIL TO DIGITALLY TRANSFORM AND ENHANCE KEY PUBLIC-FACING SERVICES

Plymouth City Council (PCC) in Devon¹ wanted to improve the quality of services it delivers across a number of areas including playgrounds and trees, with street cleansing to follow. At the top of its 'to do' list was to improve its response rates to citizens, as well as deliver value for money and manage public expectations.

At the same time, the unitary authority wanted to ensure public safety was prioritised by keeping accurate, up-to-date records of inspections, maintenance and repairs, including dates, times and locations of work done. This would not only ensure these activities took place when they should – reducing the risk to public safety – it would also furnish documented evidence to defend against liability.

In replacing existing paper-based procedures, the fully digital approach had additional benefits in making service delivery more efficient, accurate and proactive:

- It would eliminate the need for inspection teams to visit the office to collect and return

work plans and make hand-written notes.

- It would automate the processing of reports from residents and minimise the delay between reporting and action.
- It would offer a better way to document historical information about service delivery issues, or simply to capture and record what work had been carried out by which operative and when.

Solution and implementation

To this end, PCC worked with IT provider, Delt Shared Services², and selected Yotta's Alloy asset management solution³ to deliver the anticipated benefits – all from a single system.

The implementation process was fast and efficient. The project team worked closely with the council to provide a streamlined platform for asset management and data capture, teaming-up with each service area to tailor the approach to both their needs and the requirements of end users. Frontline operatives were supported throughout.

Across both playgrounds and trees, PCC has equipped its team of inspectors with the Alloy Mobile app, which is fully integrated

with the main Alloy platform. Using Alloy, customer enquiries and service requests are captured and digitally logged; work tickets are automatically created, prioritised, and sent to field repair/maintenance teams together with detailed location maps.

The teams are now using Alloy Mobile to collect and record information from inspections in real-time and append photos and a date/time-stamp before relaying it back to the administrative team, all without visiting the office. Added to this, alerts, and responses about the work are automatically sent to service users, thereby improving communication and transparency.

The results

PCC and Delt have currently imported around 260,000 trees into Alloy and created almost 2,000 individual polygons, each representing individually-managed clusters of trees. Displaying the information in this way enables the council to view its natural infrastructure across the city and quickly see the current status of work. The final stage of the project around litter bins and street cleansing is well underway and to date more than 1,000 street litter bins have been mapped and configured with attributes such as capacity, waste type, category, and strategic location, enabling the council to have a clear visual picture of its litter bin assets.



PCC's use of Alloy enables residents to get their concerns on issues such as damage to trees, or broken equipment in playgrounds resolved faster. Citizens can report issues online, in person, or through the Council's call centre. The information from those channels is then transferred into Alloy for prioritising, scheduling and action.

Further driving the process, PCC inspectors receive alerts about issues to investigate as soon as they synchronise their device to the main system, allowing a more immediate, coordinated response. Moreover, on synchronising their devices, operatives receive details of the location, position, and condition of the tree they need to work on – and a deadline. Once work is done, the operative completes the 'job' in Alloy. Information about this goes back into the Alloy back office and a notification sent to the citizen to update them on progress.

PCC also uses Alloy to get a clearer visual picture of the status of its entire trees and playgrounds estates, enabling it to better plan and prioritise work. Storing asset information in Alloy allows the Council to interrogate its data, isolating assets based on a variety of factors that allow it to better plan and prioritise repair and maintenance activities.

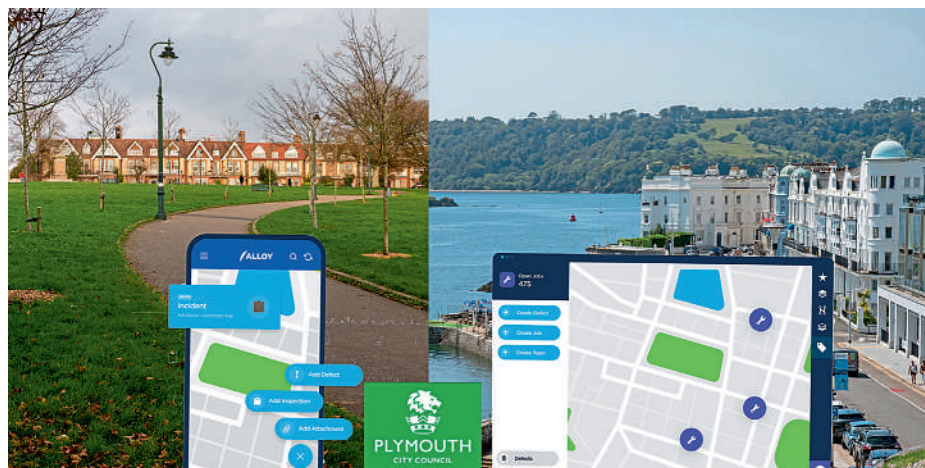
Benefits

The visual nature of Alloy's user interface allows users to quickly interpret the nature and condition of Council assets. Liam Brennan, PCC's Information Management Systems Officer, elaborates: "Stakeholders across the Council have been impressed by Alloy's ability to present assets visually in a precise and searchable manner and to view them in relation to other surrounding assets."

"The data captured by our operatives using the Alloy system helps us put data-driven decisions at the forefront of our operational planning, such as tweaking scheduled visits to our litter bins based on historic fill levels or distributing new play equipment based on defects reported by staff and residents. The visual nature of the platform and the ease with which data can be accessed also promotes joined-up working by staff and helps promote positive choices around future service delivery and provision."

The Council has been able to reduce costs by having Alloy as its centralised asset management system for all service areas. By being able to easily access and share data across service areas, it has been able to break down siloed working, reduce duplication of effort, and unlock operational efficiencies. In embarking on the road to digitalisation, the Council also took care to achieve buy-in from its operatives, inspectors and back-office staff ... all of which augurs well for the future.

As a result of the project, the authority now has a single unified data set that is continually maintained and available to



From parks and playgrounds to street cleansing and more: Alloy makes light work of maintaining and improving Council services

users. This acts as a single source of truth, encompassing the assets themselves and their history, current inspections/ maintenance tasks, and works in the pipeline. It eliminates a reliance on disparate data sources and brings everything together in a single accessible location.

The future

The project team is now developing a costed plan for the further rollout of Alloy, covering around 30 additional street cleansing and natural infrastructure activities.

The flexibility of Alloy, and the insight it delivers, is a key element of PCC's plans for a new approach whereby multi-skilled teams - cleansers, mechanical sweepers

and weed pickers, for example - can be quickly deployed to a particular area depending on need. It is yet another example of how PCC can exploit Alloy to achieve enhanced flexibility and operational efficiency across different services – both now and in the future.

1. <https://new.plymouth.gov.uk/>
2. <https://deltaservices.com/>
3. <https://weareyotta.com/alloy/>

This article was jointly contributed by Plymouth City Council and Yotta, a global provider of connected asset management software and services based in Gerrards Cross, Buckinghamshire

