

Case Study

Leading Welsh HA take Advanced Business Solutions' HR & payroll software to the next level

Client: The Seren Group

Sector: Housing Associations

Project: HR Pro

The Seren Group was formed on 1 July 2004, and is an alliance between the former Charter Housing Group and NASH (Newport Action for the Single Homeless). Seren Group Limited is a charitable Industrial and Provident Society, and the Group as a whole is not for profit, meaning that any surpluses are re-invested in the Group's activities.

The Group's Members cover the following services:

- Seren Group Limited – Central support services such as Human Resources, Information Technology, Facilities Management and Finance for Group Members
- Charter Housing Association - Homes and services for communities across South Wales
- Fairlake Properties (which incorporates Gwent Homes) - Project management and development agency services, low cost home ownership and a strategic asset management service
- REACH (Supported Living) - Care and support services for people with disabilities and other needs
- Solas Cymru - Accommodation, training and support for single homeless people.



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Their HR & Payroll software solution offering stood out because of its reporting capabilities and the fact that the software is extremely flexible. The end-users also felt that out of all the suppliers their solution was definitely the most user friendly.

- **Samantha Graf**
HR Advisor.

The Seren Group continues to grow in Wales

The Seren Group operates predominantly in the South East Wales area. Increasingly, however, the Group's work spans a wider geographical area, for example, they provide keyworker accommodation under PFI in Rhondda Cynon Taff and in Vale of Glamorgan.

The Seren Group continues to grow employing over 600 employees across Wales, supported by an HR function of six who are based in Newport.

HR Advisor Samantha Graf started with the Seren Group over four years ago, at the time Seren Group were already using HR & Payroll software from another supplier. However, as **Sam recalls**: *"It was extremely difficult to use and the limited reporting capabilities meant that it was particularly complicated to generate any kind of meaningful reports. The Seren Group was also growing and our Executive Team were demanding more and more information, but unfortunately, the system was just unable to produce the analysis that they required to make informed business decisions. The Executive Team soon recognised the limitations of the system and initiated a Working Party, tasking it with identifying a new HR & Payroll software supplier."*

The Working Party included Sam, along with other members of the HR Team and colleagues from Payroll and ICT.

Identifying HR & payroll software

Sam continues: *"One of our first tasks was to explore the marketplace and we were fortunate in that our search coincided with one of the main HR & Payroll software shows of the year. The show provided us with an ideal opportunity to compare different systems and gain a good understanding of what HR & Payroll software suppliers were offering."*

Sam immediately recognised that Advanced Business Solutions was one of the leading HR & Payroll software suppliers in the marketplace and the demonstration that she received at the show did not leave her disappointed.

After attending the HR & Payroll software show the Seren Group put together an extremely comprehensive tender, sending it out to a number of short listed HR & Payroll software suppliers.

Sam explained: *"All of the Working Party were involved in ensuring as much detail went into the tender as possible. That way suppliers received a complete picture of all our needs and requirements, including an overview of Seren Group, our ICT infrastructure and importantly what we wanted from the HR & Payroll system."*

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Each of the suppliers responses were diligently analysed before being invited in for a demonstration.

The Working Party that attended the demonstrations questioned each of the suppliers thoroughly on the functionality of the products from all areas of HR including personnel, recruitment, training, payroll and reporting. In depth questions were also asked of the suppliers on how easy it was to configure the system, in terms of new fields, screens calculations and validations.

Why Advanced Business Solutions?

Sam comments: *"Their HR & Payroll software solution offering stood out because of it's reporting capabilities and the fact that the software is extremely flexible. The end-users also felt that out of all the suppliers their solution was definitely the most user friendly."*

"The ability to have more than one record open at a time was particularly neat. With most systems, when you want to compare two employees details you have to keep opening and closing the records that you are trying to compare. However, with the software you can have both employee records open making it extremely easy to make direct comparisons."

Before making their decision representatives of the Seren Group's Working Party visited some of the HR & Payroll software suppliers' customers in order to get a better understanding of how their software performed in a live environment.

Adrienne Hole, Recruitment Advisor who has been with the Seren Group for over 25 years and a member of the Working Party explains:

"Speaking with end-users proved invaluable to me as it gave me an independent insight as to just how user friendly the HR software is."

Again, during the period of reference visits the solution stood out and the excellent endorsement from one of Advanced Business Solutions' customers led to Seren making the decision to purchase the HR software solution including the Personnel, Recruitment and Training software.

Like all Housing Associations, the Seren Group has to abide by the guidelines and regulations drawn up by various regulatory bodies. This means Key Performance Indicator's (KPI's) have to be reported on a regular basis.

Key Performance Indicators

Sam comments: *"We have worked very hard to create KPI's that the Executive Team are happy with and thanks to the HR software we are*

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now in a position to start to measure our performance, which is something that we just would not have been able to achieve with our old database. Some of the KPI's which the HR software allows us to measure effectively include absence, staff turnover, disability status and ethnicity monitoring."

The Seren Group also use Advanced Business Solutions' standard Bradford Index report as a way to help manage absenteeism across the group, it highlights those employees with high instances of short-term sickness. After liaising with HR and then during a return to work interview, Line managers are then able to discuss the high score and equally important understand the reasons for the absences. Depending on the answers this will inform how the individual case is managed. It is a fantastic tool to aid management decision making.

Sam comments: *"We are always promoting the functionality of the HR software and Line Managers also use the absence calendar to pick up on any absence trends that a member of their team may have, such as having Mondays and Fridays off on a regular basis. Used in conjunction with the Bradford Index Report, the visual presentation of the calendar allows Line Managers to identify trends quickly and act accordingly."*

Advanced Business Solutions' recruitment software

Adrienne helps leads on all recruitment for the Seren Group and as a growing organisation; the recruitment levels are very demanding. Constantly recruiting, Advanced Business Solutions' HR software manages all aspects of Seren's intensive recruitment process.

Before purchasing the recruitment software, recruitment was managed from a separate database, which meant that many labour intensive administration activities were carried out. However, now the whole recruitment process has become a lot more efficient and effective. The recruitment software manages all vacancies, applications and the whole interview process.

Adrienne comments: *"Legislation for Housing Associations means that certain vacancies require us to complete mandatory checks before a candidate can start working for us. For example, the HR software ensures that the Seren Group manage all Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks effectively. For example, following some internal customisation of HR Pro, we are able to run a CRB report every three years to ensure we remain legally compliant."*

"Before any candidate commences employment with the Group, we will use the recruitment software to help manage the process to ensure that all pre-employment checks are carried out."

Like all Housing Associations, the Seren Group can be audited under

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Schedule 1 of the Housing Act. Advanced Business Solutions' HR software assists this process effectively.

During the recruitment process, candidates go through the Seren Group's stringent recruitment process at considerable cost in both time and money, however the use of the recruitment software has helped Seren to build up a database of candidates that may be suitable for other positions inevitably leading to cost savings on future recruitment.

Adrienne explains: *"Occasionally, positions are filled in this way, which means that the Seren Group can save money in advertising recruitment costs and can also save a huge amount of time. The speed of hire is therefore improved considerably."*

Reach, one of Seren's subsidiary companies, also has a recruitment referral scheme, whereby employees can recommend a candidate for employment. If the candidate is successful in completing their 6 month probationary period, the employee who recommended them will receive £300. Internal customisation of the recruitment software helps to manage this process too.

Adrienne continues: *"We have written a number of recruitment reports that track which recruitment mediums are the most successful and the number of responses that we receive. The great thing about the HR software system is the fact that you can literally report on any field in the system."*

Easy to use and powerful report writer

Sam completed Advanced Business Solutions' recommended training and is seen as Seren's HR product champion. The knowledge gained from the HR software training courses has given Sam the confidence to make a number of significant changes in line with the changing demands of the business. Being Seren's product champion, Sam spends a considerable amount of her time writing reports for the Group's management teams. The reports allow them to analyse trends and plan the business accordingly.

"I also work very closely with the Payroll team and produce a number of salary related report for them as many of Seren's employees are paid on spinal points within set spinal ranges."

Seren has a number of payrolls for permanent and casual workers incorporating and the numbers of Payrolls are expected to grow as Seren continues to expand through acquisition, so the ability to continually customise the system is vital.

The flexibility of Advanced Business Solutions' HR software is such that Sam has configured the HR software to help the Seren Group categorise

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and record all accidents and provide a quarterly report to Seren's Health and Safety Working Party. The information allows them to analyse the data, identify any trends and then take the necessary steps to help the Seren Group control and reduce the number of accidents occurring.

Other configuration work that has been carried out includes creating a childcare voucher scheme history to manage a new initiative and a specific Personal Development Plan history (Seren's own Appraisal system) to help the Executive Team to identify and analyse training needs. Numerous new reports have also been written as any new field created with the HR software can be automatically reported upon.

The future

Like any forward thinking organisation the Seren Group are always looking to improve and are considering rolling out self-service in the future to initially help Seren Group manage personal detail changes and their holiday booking process.

Sam comments: *"Our holiday booking process is extremely complex in that we have a number of holiday years which vary depending on your role within the organisation. Also, it would be great to give line managers the opportunity to run some reports to help manage their department and also to eradicate labour intensive administration processes."*

Sam continues: *"Seren Group has been using the company's HR software for over 2 years now and each member of the team sees the system as an essential tool to their working day with the system being turned on first thing in the morning and turned off last thing at night. Their support desk is great and we hope to realise some of our plans for the HR software in the near future."*

About Business Solutions

Advanced Business Solutions, an Advanced Computer Software Group plc company, provides leading integrated business applications and services that enable public, private and third sector organisations to retain control, improve visibility and gain efficiencies whilst continually improving corporate performance. It's award-winning software systems comprise core financial management, procurement, human resource and payroll systems, integrated with a range of collaborative, document management and business intelligence solutions. It also provides managed and bureau service options.

Advanced Computer Software Group plc is the UK's leading supplier of software and IT services to the health, care and commercial sectors. It comprises 3 main divisions and has 7000 customers and 800 staff worldwide.

For more information

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