Uttlesford District Council enhances efficiency and boosts morale with Idox Insights

"The key benefits (of Idox Insights) are, to enable early identification of what the issues might be and difficulties which might be faced by the individual officer. And so, to be able to look independently at who's doing what when, and over which particular period, allows us to provide proper support to individual officers."

Councillor John Evans
Portfolio Holder for Planning
Uttlesford District Council

Overview:

Uttlesford, a rural district in northwest Essex, is populated by numerous historic villages and hamlets. It's also home to London Stansted Airport, as well as major road and rail networks connecting to London and Cambridge. As a result, Uttlesford harmonises the urban and the rural by combining an idyllic countryside environment with modern infrastructure developments.

However, as the unique character of the district evolved, its Council encountered a growing strain on planning resources. The more diverse and complex Uttlesford became, the harder it was to manage planning in timely, cost-effective ways.

Challenges:

Without the software to facilitate such processes for them, Uttlesford District Council's team leaders and managers were isolating issues by manually conducting weekly analytics. This meant spending several hours each week running access reports, migrating them to a spreadsheet, and then sharing the final report with the relevant team members. The Council inevitably came to face disparate and uneven workloads between planning officers, impacting case signoff time and – crucially – team morale.

They needed a better way to organise planning workloads, one that granted them instant access to insights and up-to-date analytics. A Council as experienced as Uttlesford knew they could instigate an in-house solution – but they rightly identified drawbacks with this approach.

First, building the knowledge base required to implement and manage alternative solutions in-house requires a high level of specific expertise. Training staff or hiring new team members would have been a lengthy and expensive process, whereas external consultants are costly, and may lack the necessary background knowledge of the Council's complex requirements.

The only option for Uttlesford was to collaborate with a solution partner – someone who would fully appreciate what a Council really needs and could provide the means to fulfil them.

Solution:

Uttlesford has maintained a long, trusted relationship with Idox for over 13 years, during which time they have successfully implemented Uniform Cloud with Enterprise, Total Land Charges, EDRMS, Public Access, and Onsite Mobile Apps.

It was therefore a natural conclusion for the Council to partner with Idox once again, as Ann Howells, Performance and Business Manager at Uttlesford, explains: "Choosing to work with Idox (on **Idox Insights**) was an easy decision. Their experience was crucial in working with us to establish the foundation and navigate the entire process - it was a no-brainer."

Once the business case for Idox Insights was confirmed, the next step was to convince the Council cabinet and its members. With a supportive and enthusiastic case presented by the Planning portfolio holder, the benefits were made clear, and so the cabinet voted in favour of the Idox Insights solution.

The go-live was a two-month collaborative and smooth process involving weekly meetings between Uttlesford and Idox. As the first customer of Idox Insights, both Uttlesford and Idox found the process useful for identifying and developing not only what could help Uttlesford, but what could benefit other councils in future.

Outcome:

Idox Insights, our cloud-based analytics and insight solution, was created to increase productivity, efficiency, and collaboration for officers, managers, and data analysts initially for development management departments. Local authorities can access analytics and dashboards to gain data-driven insights, which helps them keep track of everything from the big picture to the bottom line without relying on specialist technical skills or complex licences – making Insights the ideal software response to meet Uttlesford's needs.

Uttlesford District Council saw significant benefits a mere six months after the implementation of Idox Insights. Manual reporting is a thing of the past; spending five hours a week creating planning reports is no longer necessary. Reports are now instantly available, saving 20 hours every month on administrative tasks.

Planning officers soon stopped relying on managers like Ann to identify missed case signoffs. The platform provides direct visibility into this information, streamlining the process and preventing delays. Its intuitive interface and clear visuals ensure council staff at all levels can easily access and interpret the data without requiring specialised training.

What's more, team leaders now visualise data through Insights to assign workloads fairly, as it provides a clear overview of each officer's caseload and the complexity of each case. This visualisation has inadvertently acted as a coaching tool, facilitating mentoring and training within the team – which has provided a boost to team morale.

While it's still early days for Uttlesford's Insights journey, the benefits and return on investment are already clear to see. Dean Hermitage, Strategic Director of Planning at Uttlesford Council, explains: "Idox Insights helps our officers on a day-to-day basis – managing their workload, looking at their performance, and being able to efficiently plan site visits. It also helps managers review officers' performance day-to-day and helps me extract data to be able to report upward to our cabinet members and elected members."

Uttlesford is only scratching the surface of Idox Insights' potential. Other Council departments have already committed to using the platform for building control, planning enforcement, environmental health, and licensing. The Council ultimately aspires to make certain analytics publicly accessible to help enhance residents' understanding of the district's workload by showcasing the volume of cases handled. Additionally, this transparency could serve as a platform to demonstrate the council's significant contributions to the local community.

"Uttlesford are moving ahead in leaps and bounds," says Ann, "and we can now show everyone that we can lead the way." As a local authority, you can also be part of an innovative data-led future: Idox Insights has the capacity to provide major improvements in departments across Councils. Click below to discover how Idox Insights can revolutionise your local authority planning processes.

Call us now on 0333 011 1200 or email marketing@idoxgroup.com to learn more about Idox Insights.

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