

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council improves access to Council Tax, Housing Benefits and Care for your Area services

- New Contact Centre uses Macfarlane CallPlus technology integrated with Lagan enterprise case management and Cisco Call Manager software to drive service improvements -

London, UK. 7th March 2008. Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council has launched a new telephone Contact Centre following a Borough-wide survey that revealed local people want to be able to contact officers in these essential services quickly and at times that suited them.

The Centre, which opened at the end of January 2008, is the first phase of the Council's ambitious "Access to Services" programme, a long-term initiative which aims to make it as easy as possible for customers to get in touch with the services they require. Later phases of the project will see the opening of three face-to-face multi services centres, one in each of the major towns in the Borough - Stockton, Billingham and Thornaby.

The Council expects to answer around 180,000 incoming calls per year for these three major services, plus a further 300,000 through its main switchboard service, and is committed to significantly reducing time to answer. 27 trained Customer Services Officers currently work in the new Centre.

The Council hopes that by opening earlier and closing later, as well as by introducing a new Saturday service, it will make it easier for people to get in touch.

The Council has invested in new technology to ensure that calls are dealt with effectively, efficiently and consistently. Macfarlane Telesystems' CallPlus contact centre software is embedded within Stockton's core IP infrastructure and closely integrated with Cisco Call Manager software. The Macfarlane software is also tightly integrated with Lagan case management software to deliver additional benefits in terms of reduced call handling times and improved customer service:

- Customer telephone numbers are held in the enterprise case management system and when the customer rings in, their details “pop up” within the Lagan application on Customer Service Officers’ screens;
- Through the use of “Golden Numbers” the Macfarlane system recognises which service the customer requires and initiates the appropriate script within Lagan on the Customer Service Officer’s screen;
- Skills-based routing is employed to direct calls to the most appropriately skilled officers;
- Customer Service Officers are able to transfer both voice calls and screen data simultaneously to other Customer Service Officers, or to the “back-office”. This means that the expert is informed as to the background of the call on its transfer and is able to speak from an informed perspective from the moment the call is received;
- Customer Service Officers manage all the elements associated with telephony (making calls, transfers, conferencing etc.) and are able to respond to messages that have been left while caller are waiting in queues.

Councillor Terry Laing, Stockton Council's Cabinet Member for Corporate and Social Inclusion, said: "We're responding to what local people have told us they want - a way to find out information and have any questions answered quickly and easily. We've already had some excellent compliments from people and we'll be adding more services to the Contact Centre during the year."

Having evaluated a number of contact centre telephony solutions, the Council chose the Macfarlane CallPlus system because of its comprehensive range of management information reports, both real-time and historical, and the ease with which queues and scripts can be managed and amended by contact centre staff. Macfarlane's strategic partnership with Lagan Technologies provided added value in terms of support and the development of new integration functionality.

Debbie Hurwood, the Council's Head of Customer Services said, "We were up against some very tight deadlines to achieve the opening of the contact centre. Over a short space of time we developed an excellent working relationship with Macfarlane, which has been of great benefit to our Access to Services Programme. System implementation and training was completed within an eight week period. They really pulled out all the stops to help us achieve a successful launch and I was most impressed with the professionalism of the Macfarlane team and the support they gave us."

About Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council

The Audit Commission has named Stockton as one of only two English councils to achieve the highest rating for its 'Use of Resources' – value for money – in 2007, and awarded the maximum 4-star level for performance in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA). Stockton is also the proud winner of the Best City award in the 2007 Britain in Bloom competition.

About Macfarlane

Founded in 1987, Macfarlane is a UK developer and supplier of communication solutions to service providers, enterprises and public sector organisations. Its CallPlus platform supports a range of applications including multi media contact centre, IVR, management statistics, recording and unified communications. Its SpeechPlus platform supports Speech Recognition, and other speech-driven applications such as the Macfarlane VoiceDialler. The company delivers cost-effective, market-focused solutions directly and through strategic partnerships with vendors such as Lagan, Capita, Northgate, Steria and Serco.

Macfarlane has established a strong position in the public sector where it assists central and local government reach e-government targets, providing a citizen-centric approach while working within Best Value practices. Existing customers number more than 80 local councils including those within the Government's Partnership programme such as Somerset Direct Partnership, the Warwickshire Direct Partnership, the Lancashire Direct Partnership, and more recently the Staffordshire Connects Partnership. CallPlus has enabled these Partnerships to link their many local councils and create single 'virtual' contact centres that serve citizens on a county-wide basis. More details can be found at <http://www.macfar.co.uk>

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