

Integrated customer service approach reaps rewards for Chichester Council

London, UK, 30th June 2009. Chichester District Council has boosted the percentage of customer queries resolved on first contact to over 80 percent while slashing the number of abandoned calls and boosting customer satisfaction. The improvements follow a Council-wide programme of customer service investment.

In one service area, Housing services, the percentage of abandoned customer calls to the Council has fallen from 15 percent to under 3 percent, with 91 percent of calls now answered within 20 seconds. The initiative has also led to a 79 percent reduction in the number of telephone calls being dealt with by Housing Officers, enabling them to spend more time on important tasks such as improving customer accessibility, providing home visits for clients and driving improvement across service performance indicators. Overall, 90% of Housing service customers said they were satisfied with the service received in a customer satisfaction poll.

Chichester's customer service programme has involved the creation of a customer contact centre, and the deep integration of telephone, web and CRM into the Council's business processes and established back office systems. The contact centre is powered by Macfarlane CallPlus and Lagan Enterprise Case Management (ECM) technology.

Based on its experiences and customer feedback, the Council is also in the process of creating a dedicated Customer Service Centre for handling face-to-face customer enquiries that is expected to open at the end of July 2009.

Contact centre

The customer service initiative kicked off in 2004 with a project team undertaking extensive business and process analysis within Housing services and Building Control, Planning Enforcement and Planning services. Armed with this analysis, the

Council set up a pilot centre in 2005 to test the impact of contact centre-working on the organisation and its value to customers.

The Contact Centre initially received all telephone, face-to face, generic email and web enquiries at first point of contact for Housing services and for Building Control, Planning Enforcement and Planning technicians. The Council routed customer calls direct to the contact centre, allowing all other calls to be dealt with through the switchboard. By providing customer service personnel with access to the Council's existing Lagan ECM capabilities that are deeply integrated into its back office systems, the Council hoped to resolve more customer enquiries at first point of contact and improve service levels.

Within a short period of time, the centre's 8 personnel were dealing with over 70 processes on behalf of the two service areas, in excess of 2,000 telephone calls per week, 150-200 personal visitors and approximately 40-50 email and web enquiries.

Based on the success of bringing Housing and Planning and Building Control services into the customer service centre, Chichester has recently added a number of new services – Concessionary Fares, Pest Control, Dog Control, and Land Charge Enquiries – and will be adding Revenue and Benefits and Contract Services in the near future. This has boosted the number of contacts handled to around 9000 a month.

Today, the customer service operation employs 13 personnel who are all multi-skilled to serve customers over the phone or face-to-face.

Integrated Telephony

In the initial contact centre pilot, the Council used a rudimentary call handling capability within its Philips Sopho phone system. However, over time, and as CRM fast became a corporate-wide system for Chichester, it recognised the need for telephony to be tightly integrated into both its CRM and web capabilities and for the need for more integrated phone and email handling capabilities.

In late 2008, the Council researched the market for an enhanced telephony solution that could deliver the flexibility and scalability the Council required. It also sought advanced multi channel contact handling capabilities and the ability to integrate

telephony to other in house systems. In January 2009, Chichester Council selected the CallPlus contact centre platform from Macfarlane Telesystems, a Lagan gold partner. The system was fully implemented and integrated to Chichester's existing CRM system and Philips phone system in April 2009.

The CallPlus platform delivers advanced contact centre capabilities for the Council including intelligent call handling, queue management, agent screenphones (integrated to the Lagan ECM system), call recording, multimedia contact handling (for call, web and email contacts), sophisticated management information, interactive voice response and computer telephony integration (CTI). Additional features such as an IVR-based customer survey application, a lone worker application and integrated SMS text, & web handling have been purchased and will be implemented soon.

"The Customer Service Centre initiative has made a huge impact and really changed the ethos of the Council towards service" said Jane Dodsworth, Assistant Director ICT & Customer Service, Chichester District Council. "It's now top of the Council agenda!"

On the addition of the Macfarlane CallPlus solution, Jane comments: "Macfarlane's approach has been very professional and they have taken it upon themselves to project manage the Lagan ECM and Philips switch integrations - making the whole integration process seamless and painless for us."

"It's been a real pleasure dealing with Chichester Council" said Paul Skinner, Director, Macfarlane Telesystems. "They are totally focused on achieving great results for their customers and have an exciting and fully integrated technology vision that we are delighted to be part of."

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About Macfarlane Telesystems

Founded in 1987, Macfarlane Telesystems develop and implement open standards-based contact centre systems that lead the field in supporting multi-media contacts

so that your customers can contact you in whichever way suits them, be it telephone, fax, email, web, text, IM, picture or video message.

CallPlus manages and routes these types of contacts in a unified and intelligent way, thus ensuring optimal efficiency of operation and maximising on agent skills.

Macfarlane has established a strong position in the public sector, assisting over 80 local councils in reaching e-government targets. In addition, Macfarlane have also implemented systems within many Countywide Partnerships, such as Warwickshire On-line and Lancashire Direct.

Macfarlane has established business partnerships with key CRM vendors including Lagan, Northgate and Microsoft; system integrators such as Anite; and managed service providers such as Steria, Capita and Serco.

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