

Unified Communications helps Northampton Borough Council achieve Customer Service Excellence

- Council extends its investment in Macfarlane CallPlus technology with new Choice-Based Lettings application -

15th December 2009. Northampton Borough Council, the largest district council in England, has achieved the Customer Service Excellence award following a series of investments to improve customer choice, enhance service levels and cut wastage.

In the last two years, the Council has:

- extended the number of services delivered through its Customer Contact Centre
- launched a Choice-Based Lettings service that allows homeseekers to bid for new homes by phone, SMS or over the web
- introduced a sophisticated and integrated workforce management and scheduling system

An extensive range of Council services are now provided through the Centre including: Housing Repairs, Housing Customer Services, Cleansing (waste, graffiti etc.), Complaints, 'Councillor Contact Centre', switchboard answering for general enquires, Environmental Health, Housing Needs, Tenancy Support, Council Tax, Benefits and Rent Income. The Centre currently employs 33 personnel and handles around 6250 customer calls per week.

Adding Choice-Based Lettings Capabilities

Call handling and unified communications technology from Macfarlane Telesystems has been at the heart of Northampton's Customer Contact Centre since it opened in June 2006.

Macfarlane CallPlus technology intelligently routes all incoming calls to appropriate Advisors, records calls, and provides both automated call handling (IVR) and detailed management reporting. .

In June 2008, the Council invested in Macfarlane's Choice-Based Lettings module to give citizens a flexible and automated means of bidding for new homes. The software enables Homeseekers to register their interest in a property by entering details on the Council's Homechoice web site, calling an automated phone service, or by SMS texting. For SMS applications, the Macfarlane system automatically texts individuals to confirm that their bids have been received, whereas for phone applications the caller is given a live update on their home choice.

The Council's Choice-Based Lettings scheme has proven very successful. "Feedback from everyone that's used the system has been extremely positive" says Alison Hacking, Choice-Based Lettings Project Manager, Northampton Borough Council, who says that Macfarlane has been very responsive and supportive throughout the implementation process. "Macfarlane will always make sure there is a professional and knowledgeable back-up personnel available. They have also been able to explain issues in non-technical terms, which has greatly helped our understanding of projects from beginning to end."

Integrated Workforce Management

In March 2009, Northampton integrated its Macfarlane CallPlus technology with workforce management software from Q-Max. Q-Max enables Northampton's contact centre management to calculate, in advance, the number of advisors required to respond to customer demand, ensuring there are sufficient advisors, with the right skills, available at all times. It also creates staff rotas to ensure advisors are available, thereby automating what was previously a hugely time-consuming task.

CallPlus sends data to Q-Max in real time, enabling Q-Max to run an alert window that constantly monitors call traffic and compares it to historic traffic patterns for the same period. This capability allows Contact Centre Management to immediately see changes in call traffic trends and use Q-Max to suggest ways of responding to them. This allows a fluidity of resource allocation that is not possible with a manual system.

"We're delighted to have been given the opportunity to extend our work with Northampton Borough Council" said Paul Skinner, Sales Director, Macfarlane Telesystems. "The Council has created highly flexible and user-friendly customer services that put the customer at the heart of the interaction, 24 hours a day, seven days a week."

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About Northampton Borough Council

Northampton Borough Council is the largest district council in the country – serving a population of 200,000 in mainly urban areas. It employs approximately 1,400 staff and has a housing stock of approximately 12,700. The town's strategic position at the centre of the country's commercial trading routes has been a major factor in Northampton's growth and success since it was first granted a charter in 1189.

About Macfarlane

Founded in 1987, Macfarlane Telesystems develops and implements open standards-based contact centre systems, leading the field in the support of multi-media contact so that customers can make contact when it suits them best and using their media of choice (i.e. telephone, email, web, text, IM, picture or video message). CallPlus manages and routes these types of contacts in a unified and intelligent way, ensuring optimal efficiency and the best use of 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 has 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.

Press enquiries:

Michael Gray

Gray Associates

Tel: +44 (0)20 8224 2315

michael@grayassociates.co.uk