

MANCHESTER HOUSING CALL CENTRE PROVES A BEACON OF SUCCESS

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A pilot call centre "Manchester Housing On Call", introduced to serve a fifth of Manchester City Council's housing management service, has been judged successful by councillors and is being rolled out to cover the remaining 40,000 properties.

The new approach has proved popular in the pilot area, with surveys showing an impressive 95per cent satisfaction rating for the call centre and most people saying it had made access to the service easier.

The expansion of the call centre means that it will be able to handle all housing-related calls from Manchester tenants in the near future.

MCC's Project Manager, Mike Stevens, said: "We went live with the pilot in November 1999 and over the following 12 months the call centre 'traffic' grew to around 700 calls a day, calls that otherwise would have added to the burden on local area housing offices. Essentially what we did was respond to the aspirations of our customers for improved telephone answering and locally-based staff spending more time on the issues that most concern local people.

"The results were extremely positive, gaining support from local elected members and the Council. So the decision was taken to extend the service to the remainder of the city's housing stock"

In all 20 advisors now deal with calls. They are helped in this by state-of-the-art technology which means that even advisors without housing experience can deal effectively with customers' queries.

Teleconnect, a "product" of enterprise solutions provider Cedar, guides advisors through 80 different

call types, meaning that call transfers to back office staff are kept to a minimum as they can in most cases be handled and processed by the advisor who answers the call.

Explains Cedar's Mark Edgeworth: "The advisor is responsible for working through the process of diagnosing the caller's requirements, and taking the right action: for example ordering a repair, booking an appointment for a local officer, surveyor or contractor to visit the property, giving advice about rent or rehousing or taking payments from tenants. Where a confirmation letter is needed these are processed automatically.

Tenants are telling the Council that this is what they expect from a modern housing service."

The call centre helped Manchester to be awarded Beacon Council status for its repairs and maintenance service. This meant that the Council was able to hold open days and seminars for other UK authorities so that other councils could learn from their success.

In their demonstrations Teleconnect was cited as being a key contributor to the call centre's success, delivering significant benefits in terms of call quality and consistency.

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