

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL DRAMATICALLY IMPROVES CUSTOMER SERVICE WITH INVESTMENT IN MACFARLANE CONTACT CENTRE TECHNOLOGY

Submitted by: Gray Associates

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Macfarlane Telesystems announces today that Maidstone Borough Council has completed the installation of a new customer centre based on Macfarlane CallPlus contact centre technology together with Northgate's Front Office CRM software and RightNow's knowledge management software. The contact centre currently has nine front office staff, who are handling around 7500 calls per month. The Council plans to expand the number of personnel employed in the centre to around 20 by 2005.

The new contact centre has already had a dramatic effect on the quality of service delivered to citizens in the Borough. Prior to the contact centre going live on 1st April 2004, calls to the Council's Housing Benefit, Environmental Services and Highways enquiry lines were handled by personnel spread throughout these various departments - and because there was no queuing system in place, as few as 40 % of incoming calls were being successfully handled. Not only were customers unhappy, Council staff were also getting dejected by the inadequacy of the systems in place.

By April 2004 however, this picture had changed dramatically - with 88% of Housing Benefit, 94% of Environmental Services and 93% of Highways enquiry lines calls being handled successfully - and satisfaction amongst contact centre personnel considerably higher.

"We've been extremely pleased by the impact the new contact centre has had" stated Councillor John Williams, Cabinet Member for Customer Services at Maidstone Borough Council. "Not only are we successfully handling more calls but we also feel that the quality of call handling has improved significantly. We've recently received a number of compliments from members of the public thanking us for the quality of the service they've received - a tribute to the hard work and professionalism of our contact centre personnel".

Maidstone Borough Council decided to invest in the new customer centre in September 2003 as part of a radical programme to bring about a step change in the quality of customer service delivery. Customer service was identified as one of seven priorities in the Council's three year performance plan and a major structural change program put in place that involved changes at all levels - from the appointment of a customer service councillor to structural changes at the office level.

Technology vendors were invited to tender for the contact centre technology contract and a joint bid from Northgate and Macfarlane accepted. The Council then set about refurbishing one of its buildings in Maidstone to house the centre and brought together its reception staff, switchboard and enquiry line personnel to form the core contact centre team.

The Macfarlane CallPlus solution installed in the new centre includes an ACD facility, call recording software, management information software, and interactive voice response software (which is mainly used for citizens to make over-the-phone payments when the centre is closed for parking fines, council tax etc). The Macfarlane solution is tightly integrated with the Northgate CRM software which manages the customer interaction, providing contact centre personnel with customer histories and other relevant data as well as creating customer records and logging calls.

Paul Taylor, the Assistant Director for Customer Service at Maidstone Borough Council has been delighted with the performance of the new technology. "Implementation was achieved on time and without disrupting service to our customers. It's a significant improvement in the quality of our phone answering technology which has made a big difference in the service we can deliver to our customers. We can now not only answer more calls but also more tightly monitor calls for quality, change messages, and give out important topical information to callers before they even reach a contact centre agent".

Paul and his team have aspirations and plans to develop the contact centre solution in a number of ways. From a technology point of view, they are working to develop interfaces into many of its back office systems (such as its South Bank Systems' Environmental Services database server), while from a people perspective they are increasingly looking to use the management information received to identify more flexible staffing structures. Maidstone Council is also looking to deliver other Council services such as Planning, Environmental Health and Council Tax enquiries via its new contact centre over time.

"We're delighted to have been part of a project that has clearly made an enormous difference to the quality of service being delivered to local citizens" said Paul Skinner, Sales Director of Macfarlane Telesystems. "Macfarlane now has over 50 Local Government installations and we are rapidly establishing CallPlus as the no. 1 contact centre platform in the public sector".

"This latest success reinforces the position of the Northgate Front Office and Macfarlane CallPlus combination as the leading contact centre solution of choice for UK local authorities" says Steve Knighton, Head of Sales, UK Government Division, Northgate Information Solutions.

About Macfarlane Telesystems

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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 contact centre, IVR and unified communications. The company delivers cost-effective, market-focused solutions directly and through strategic partnerships with vendors such as Northgate, Onyx, Sx3 and Deloitte.

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 50 local councils including those within the Government's Partnership programme such as Somerset Direct Partnership, the Warwickshire On-line Partnership and more recently, the Cornish Key Partnership. These users have implemented CallPlus to provide a telephony solution, whereby all the councils in the County are linked in order to provide a cohesive virtual contact centre to any citizen within the County.

More details can be found at www.macfar.co.uk

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Pictures are available upon request