



Partnership approach improves customer service and propels councils to the top of the efficiency league

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Leader
Suffolk County Council

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Suffolk joins forces with BT to launch the UK’s first two-tier customer service partnership with seamless links between County and District levels

Marketplace

Suffolk is home to nearly 680,000 people, many living in rural areas. Two tiers of local government are together responsible for service provision. The first is the County Council, which delivers services to customers throughout the area. The second is five District Councils and two Borough Councils. Confusion meant that customers often contacted County Council officials about issues that were part of the District Council’s remit, and vice versa, causing frustration and delay.

Mid Suffolk District Council was keen to explore options for ramping up service delivery. With three-quarters of its 87,000-strong population living in villages of less than 500, some lacking a bus service, seeing council representatives to resolve problems was often difficult. It therefore joined forces with the County Council to carry out a joint assessment.

Business opportunity

Market testing was carried out on making the conventional two-tier system more transparent, and BT won a ten-year contract to transform the County and District Councils’ service provision. A new joint venture company was formed, Customer Service Direct (CSD) Limited, with 600 staff running networked IT services for 27,500 internal customers and 680,000 residents.

Councillor Tim Passmore, Leader of Mid Suffolk District Council, says: “Our predominantly rural district council was faced with making corporate efficiencies to deliver service more effectively. This pioneering partnership between private and public sectors is tailor made to achieve these outcomes.” “The whole perspective of this was: how does the customer want to access our services? It was not an inward-looking case of how we wanted to provide those services to them,” adds Andrew Good, Chief Executive of Mid Suffolk District Council.

BT solution

A BT team of 50 specialists began to shape the business process and technical improvements needed to fulfil the councils’ shared vision of integrated services. BT’s partner throughout the project was CGI Group, a Canadian company specialising in information technology and business process services. Twenty-five CGI staff worked on site, managing the cultural shift towards a customer-centric service. By delivering a package of specialist IT skills and access to credible business process change management, BT offered a seamless service. A managed regional IP-based converged infrastructure was built on BT metroVPN.

Case study

Suffolk County Council and Mid Suffolk District Council

“BT scores heavily in both financial stability and technological capacity, and has a track record as a longstanding supplier to government. BT brought the best blend of private sector focus, discipline and structure; and public service ethos.”

Bob Cunningham,
Chief Executive Officer
Customer Service Direct Limited

“Among the companies trying to do business with us, BT was quite unique,” Andrew Good comments. “It had the only model of public access that excited us and CGI, its choice of implementation partner, provided the wherewithal in terms of a platform to build upon.”

In public access, front line agents use BT’s Contact Central – a powerful eCommunity Relationship Management (eCRM) solution. Contact Central tracks individual enquiries and provides a greatly enhanced service, with more than 80 per cent of public queries resolved at first contact compared to 60 per cent previously. The use of voice over IP (VoIP) on various campuses is providing further integration benefits, and will ultimately result in significant cost savings and service enhancements.

An enhanced website allows residents to log queries, complete transactions, or view detailed information or advice on births, council tax, housing and transport. From the agents’ side, the website offers prompts and suggestions to progress enquiries. Online information can be called up during enquiries with reference numbers allocated to each customer query enabling quick retrieval. A web-enablement tool, gBIZ from CGI, acts as a real time interface between agents’ computer terminals and back office systems, including key customer databases. This ensured that the web-based capabilities of Contact Central could interact with legacy systems seamlessly.

While committing itself to a £50 million investment during the ten-year lifetime of the contract, BT has delivered business process re-engineering, change management and training – as well as career development opportunities for council staff

through secondments. Bob Cunningham, CEO of CSD, explains: “BT scores heavily in both financial stability and technological capacity, and has a track record as a longstanding supplier to government. BT brought the best blend of private sector focus, discipline and structure; and public service ethos.”

Results

The customer service centre in Stowmarket – equipped with six face-to-face public station areas, and a 30-seat call centre for telephone and internet enquiries – opened within five months of contracts being signed. It is the first of three facilities opened in Mid Suffolk. Customer satisfaction rates are already in excess of 80 per cent and further efficiencies will be realised in the coming year. “We would not have been able to meet these timescales without BT,” says Bob Cunningham. “BT was able to react quickly and bring both its experience and significant resources into play. It was thanks to BT that the service centre opened so quickly, and the process ran so smoothly.”

The partnership has helped both Suffolk County Council and Mid Suffolk District Council to reach the top of local authority efficiency league tables. And in the longer term, BT’s financial stability underpins a secure business model, where upfront investment in networked IT services is paid for through process change over time. Councillor Jeremy Pembroke, Leader of Suffolk County Council, concludes: “The objective of this partnership was to equip our staff with the right tools, so that they could provide an even better level of service. This would not have been possible without BT’s financial commitment, systems improvement knowledge, and joined up approach to networking services.”

Offices worldwide

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Main BT products and services

- Business process re-engineering, change management and training services
- BT’s Contact Central CRM solution, featuring Siebel’s enterprise CRM application with IP communications technology
- Implementation of Voice over IP and convergence platforms, and development of a transactional public access website

