

## Copeland Borough Council puts e-government targets in its sights with Contact Central

Through Contact Central, Copeland Borough Council in Cumbria, gets a call centre worthy of a multinational corporation at a fraction of the cost. Not only that, but it propels Copeland to the forefront of e-government, meeting key performance targets

Citizens of Copeland, Cumbria, often had to speak to three people before getting through to the department that could deal with their queries. This diverted those in the departments away from their core activity and frustrated the callers. Now all it takes is a single phone call to Copeland Direct, answered by a skilled adviser empowered using BT's Contact Central. The Council aims initially to handle 50% of all calls at the first point of contact, with seven specialist customer service agents. This change will help it meet national performance targets all within existing budgets and a revolutionary three months.

Today, Copeland's customer-facing staff treat citizens consistently through better management of information brought about by integrating databases linked to Contact Central. (See box on page 3.)

### A rural council with a mission to modernise

Copeland Borough Council serves a population of 71,000 in Whitehaven and surrounding rural areas in West Cumbria, England. It is an area of great natural beauty but with pockets of social and economic deprivation. As a strategic partner in the Connected Cumbria initiative, along with all Cumbrian local authorities and in the West Cumbria Partnership with Allerdale Borough Council, Copeland is very much regarded as innovative. It is both an instigator of change and a 'Beacon Council' for town planning. It is also recognised by central government as being proactive in achieving challenging e-government and modernisation targets. Copeland looks after a broad range of services from, refuse collection, street cleaning and grounds maintenance through car parking, civic hall events and sports activities to maintaining the electoral register and handling complaints.

### Government targets to hit

Like other local authorities in England, Copeland is modernising to provide the best possible local services within tight budget controls. This poses several challenges to elected councillors and their officers.

The government's reforms require that local authorities are tested against their peers in comprehensive performance assessments (CPAs), league tables, based on information from bodies such as the Social Services Inspectorate, the Benefits Fraud Inspectorate and the Audit Commission.

### Becoming accessible – 60% of contact with the council is by telephone

Local authorities also face regular tests to ensure they are providing best value. One important 'best value performance indicator' (BVPI) measures progress



### Key Results

- All the benefits of a high-end Siebel CRM solution at a fraction of the cost
- 50% of queries put by the people of Copeland to their local council are now answered at the point of contact – ultimately the target is 70%
- Meeting targets for e-government within a tight local authority budget

“ Our initial target was that 50% of calls should be answered successfully first time but we expect to move quickly to a 70% success rate. ”

Peter Crone, Systems Manager,  
Copeland Borough Council

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towards e-government. Every local authority is subject to the national target of making all public services available electronically by the end of 2005.

Copeland is no exception. But it faced some special problems in modernising services. The main one was that because two thirds of their citizens live in rural areas inconvenient for visiting the Council’s area offices in Whitehaven, Egremont, Cleator Moor and Millom, most people rely on being able to contact the Council by phone. According to Councillor Elaine Woodburn, Deputy Leader, about 60% of all contact is currently by phone.

Traditionally, however, the Council was not set up to handle phone inquiries efficiently: they all had to go through one operator.

Even when residents had a direct line for the person they required they would find that phones weren’t answered if an officer was unavailable. At the same time busy specialists were often interrupted by inappropriate or routine questions.

**Joining up services and making the council accessible**

“The majority of calls may be asking: ‘When’s my bin going to be picked up?’ They don’t have to be put through to a senior officer to have that answered,” says Councillor Woodburn. “Somebody who’s been taught and trained can answer that at first point of call.”

“It was a very fragmented service, it wasn’t at all



“ Through partnership and teamwork we will develop new job opportunities, ensure everyone has access to value for money services, and achieve the best possible quality of life for the people of Copeland ”

Copeland Borough Council Mission Statement

joined up,” sums up Peter Crone, systems manager.

The first step in improving communications, according to Ken Hastings, Head of Strategy and Communications, was to carry out a best value review of access to services. “As part of that we decided that we needed to change radically the way we provide services to local people, both by telephone and also when dealing with the public face-to-face, at our local offices.” Looking ahead, the Council was also interested in making more use of its web site encouraging citizens to answer their queries online. It also wanted to explore new media technologies such as text messaging.

**Reorganising services around the customer’s needs**

The way forward was to reorganise Council services so that the focus was on the ‘customer’ rather than the department. This would involve setting up a contact centre, capable of handling information through several different channels – phone, personal visits and e-mail. Trained advisers would be able to resolve most inquiries during a single phone call, reducing costly and frustrating inefficiencies. This was the origin of Copeland Direct delivering best value access to services.

One major problem remained: finding the right IT system to support such a contact centre. The system, together with the associated management change, would have to be implemented quickly – and at an ongoing cost which was well within existing and future budgets.

**COPELAND BOROUGH COUNCIL MISSION STATEMENT**

<p><b>1. CLEAR VISION</b> Clear about our objectives and how our performance will be measured and monitored.</p>	<p><i>taking, meeting new ideas with enthusiasm not scepticism.</i></p>	<p><b>8. INVEST IN OUR STAFF</b> Recognise that staff are our greatest asset and ensure they are properly motivated, developed as individuals, and fully involved.</p>
<p><b>2. STRATEGIC</b> Forward looking, responding quickly to emerging issues and searching for new opportunities.</p>	<p><b>5. REWARDING/ADAPTING</b> Recognise success whenever it happens and learn from our mistakes.</p>	<p><b>9. GOOD COMMUNICATIONS</b> Ensure our communications are effective throughout the Council and with the Community.</p>
<p><b>3. FAIR &amp; EQUAL TREATMENT</b> Treat everyone fairly, with dignity and respect, and actively promote equal opportunities for all.</p>	<p><b>6. CORPORATE WORKING</b> Ensure that there is a well co-ordinated corporate approach to all our activities.</p>	<p><b>10. HIGH STANDARDS</b> Abide by the recommendations of the Nolan Committee on Standards in Public Life, particularly in terms of Openness, Integrity and Accountability.</p>
<p><b>4. INNOVATE</b> Encourage innovation and calculated risk</p>	<p><b>7. PRIDE IN OURSELVES</b> Encourage a sense of pride in the Council and in the Borough.</p>	

Conventionally, setting up a contact centre involves a customer relationship management (CRM) system. However such a system, with high software and implementation costs, would have been beyond the resources of a small local authority.

### Scalable out-of-the-box solution

Copeland's team found only one suitable and affordable product on the market: Contact Central, from BT. The system, used in BT's own award-winning contact centres, is a scalable, out-of-the-box solution especially configured for local government. The Council concluded that the local government version of Contact Central was unique in the market both in functionality and in price.

BT's Contact Central team, backed with the company's long experience and knowledge of local government, was able to implement a pilot system and assist with the necessary management changes within three months of the Council deciding to go ahead. The cost, was largely funded from the e-government implementation money from central government. The rest will come from improvements in efficiency, for example in collecting fees such as car parking fines due to the Council.

### Redesigned reception area and contact centre improves the council's image

Although the pilot was deliberately kept low-key, improvements were immediately apparent. The most obvious was the Council's reception area: "It's gone from black and white to Technicolor," was one comment.

In the re-designed reception, two newly trained customer services officers deal with visitors face-to-face while five agents in the call centre immediately behind resolve telephone enquiries. The staff were selected from existing employees by BT experts, who were looking for enthusiasm and an aptitude for dealing with members of the public.

To assist the new customer services officers each council department compiled a list of the 10 most frequently asked questions they have to answer. That advice is now the core of a script which allows the customer service officers to satisfactorily resolve 50% of the enquiries they receive.

### More efficient revenue collection

While this new customer-focused approach was in its pilot stage, Contact Central handled several Council services from car parking and complaints. Ultimately, the intention is to put all Council services on the system. Car parking was picked because of the high volume of calls

## WHAT BT DID FOR COPELAND

### Improved service levels

*All citizen contacts are treated consistently, which ensures service levels are established and monitored for all contact channels – 50% of calls are handled at first point of contact.*

*More customer-facing staff. Cutting the number of duplicate and unnecessary phone calls and letters means that more back-office staff can be deployed to deal with citizens' inquiries.*

*Improved quality and speed of service. Citizen history information is instantly available to advisers handling inquiries. Citizens are seamlessly routed to advisers allowing the Council to prioritise.*

### Improved efficiency and flexibility

*Staff members in the upgraded reception area and in the contact centre immediately behind, take calls through the system. Other trained advisers can be deployed as necessary. In the contact centre, all interactions can be configured in any way that the Council requires. This allows managers to maximise the efficiency of the contact centre quickly and easily.*

### Optimisation of spend/best value access to services provider

*Fewer unnecessary or uncompleted transactions mean that systems and staff are deployed more efficiently, cutting back-office costs. Contact Central's ability to handle all communications channels reduces the need for multiple applications and the costs of training staff on them.*

### Enhanced audit trails of citizen orders and request.

*Call scripts are created within Contact Central to enable advisers to retrieve relevant information quickly and efficiently ensuring that all information required for the service is captured and archived in the Contact Central database. This creates an accurate and complete audit log of citizen requests.*

### Integration

*Contact Central supports many methods of integrating with other applications/databases, thus reducing the time to implement joined-up services and other modernisation initiatives.*

### Better management information

*This alone is a massive benefit, says Dr John Stanforth, General Manager of Copeland Council: "At the moment we don't know how many people telephone us. We don't know how long it takes us to deal with those calls. We don't know how many calls we miss. We don't know what people visit us about. And all that information will be collected and we can then see what the pattern of our contact is and we can plan and prepare more effectively for dealing with that contact."*

### Improved benchmarking

*Contact Central enables Copeland to benchmark with similar local authorities in the Audit Commission's 'Family Group' and with other neighbouring authorities.*

### Reduced financial risk.

*Contact Central is supplied by market leading suppliers, which minimises the financial risk; hardware and software upgrades are fully supported.*

– between 20 and 30 a day, a number expected to triple with the changes to parking enforcement following decriminalisation. This means that the responsibility for issuing and collection will be solely down to local authorities. Also, previous procedures for handling calls had been less than ideal. “Previously they had to go up to three different offices for different permits” Mr Crone says, “now it’s one.”

### Increasing revenue and reducing costs

Apart from reducing the frustration of callers, the Council benefits directly. Dealing with inquiries efficiently and authoritatively improves income from parking fines. “We’re encouraging people to pay rather than to make an appeal, for which there are very limited grounds,” says Mr Crone. Contact Central also cuts the cost of chasing non-payers.

Perhaps even more important is the second service tested in the pilot. A local authority’s reputation among its citizens depends largely on how it handles complaints. Contact Central allows Copeland to handle them in a businesslike way. Complaints are tracked with a case management system which logs action taken and allows documents to be attached.

The aim of Copeland Direct is to provide best value access to services for citizens without requiring additional local authority funding. Over the long term, revenue savings must be at least equal to the implementation costs. The service should also make council staff feel better about the job they do. Results from the pilot are promising.

### Motivated staff more responsive to customers’ needs

Contact centre staff get the satisfaction of resolving people’s inquiries rather than merely passing them on to the right department. Contact Central also improves employee satisfaction by providing a consistent user interface for all channels. This reduces complexity and improves the usability of the application. It also enables specialists to get on and deliver what they are paid to do. Already the benefits department is eager to get its services integrated with the system so that it can process more benefits more promptly.

“I see it as very positively contributing to staff satisfaction. It’s going to benefit staff development considerably,” says Peter Crone.

Citizens and other customers are more likely to have their inquiries resolved in a single phone call, and much less likely to meet an engaged or unanswered phone. “If 50% of our customers get a better service, that’s a big improvement,” says Peter Crone.

## HOW IT WORKS

*BT Contact Central is an out-of-the-box solution providing the core functionality of a Siebel CRM solution at a low entry cost. The system is in use at BT’s Newcastle Contact Centre, recently designated European Call Centre of the Year.*

*A low cost of entry, thanks to ‘per seat’ costs makes BT Contact Central commercially viable at any scale. BT also offers specialised pre- and post-trial consultancy in identifying and implementing best practice.*

*A major barrier to the use of CRM in local government has been the large number of different services that a local authority provides. BT’s partnership with Copeland, and long experience in local government, gives it an insight into the resulting complexities and enabled it to adapt Contact Central for the purpose.*

*The BT Contact Central development team tailored Contact Central to include more than 50 local government processes and documented how Contact Central would be applied to them.*

*The Copeland project was a team effort, involving BT’s local government CRM team. The company helped Copeland select and train customer service advisors.*

*To equip contact centre advisers to resolve calls, each council department was asked to submit answers to 10 frequently asked questions (FAQs) for the customer services staff to have on hand. “The initial target was that 50% of calls should be answered successfully first time but we expect to move quickly to a 70% success rate”, says Peter Crone.*

*The next major service to be offered through the system is likely to be benefits. Today, the Council’s benefits office receives about 300 calls a week.*

*Another two are refuse collection and pest control. This is important for revenue collection because that system will ensure that payments are collected before that call is passed to the back office.*

