

Westminster Council

Case Study

Situation

The City of Westminster's role at the heart of a world and capital city, with its unrivalled historic environment coupled with its strong economic base, results in demands on its services unequalled amongst its peers. Unsurprisingly, Westminster City Council is one of the busiest local authorities in the country, dealing with some of the most complex development, policy, social, economic, conservation, and public realm and city management issues.

The Council is committed to providing world class city management in order to deliver strong communities and provide excellent services to achieve the Council's vision of "Better City, Better Lives". The aim is to make everyone in Westminster feel more involved in their local community. The Council wants to make it easier for people to make connections with one another, and to feel more connected to vital services and information.

The Council provides a wide range of services to meet the diverse needs of residents, businesses and visitors to Westminster. For example:

- The Council is responsible for 1,000 kilometres of roads/footpaths, making it one of the biggest in the country
- The Council receives over 12,000 planning applications a year
- The Council receives on average 8,000 licensing applications per year and has 2,964 licensed premises – almost three times the London average
- The Council conducts the third highest number of civil ceremonies in England and Wales from 130 licensed venues
- The Council bills Business Rates to just over 35,000 companies.

Customers accessed these services via a number of channels including online, through interactive voice recognition ("IVR"), via telephone and face-to-face (through the Post Office). Phone and email channels are delivered by an outsourced contact centre partner.

Research showed that customers wanted the convenience of being able to discover and do things online and expected high-quality, 'anytime, anywhere' access from a range of devices.

To meet this customer demand as part of its commitment to the 'Better City, Better Lives' programme, the Council's vision was to enable and empower its customers to transact with its services quickly and easily at any time, and through any channel.

Part of this vision was delivered through the transition of Council Contact Centre services to a new Service Provider and in a new operating model that embodied Channel Shift signposting to new online functionality via the Council's new website.

Action

Obrar consultant Peter Venn was brought in because of his experience and skill in four key areas:

- Setting up and managing contact centres
- Developing and implementing targeted learning and development strategies
- Service partner management
- Self-serve channel switch programmes.

Understanding how outsource Service Providers operate, we contributed to a clear, concise and well-defined Service Specification, guaranteeing that responders could be evaluated effectively and consistently. Additionally, using our commercial expertise around how service providers cost, we were able to recommend a pricing model within the Invitation to Tender that ensured that any contract could be managed effectively, with KPIs that provided early warning against any behaviours that could drive cost up.

However, the essence of the approach we took with Westminster was around people. Our consultants understand that, in a period of great change, it is people, not process nor technology, which will create success or risk failure. By engaging with internal colleagues in the public service departments, Procurement, Legal, Finance and Contracts Management, we were able to ensure Council contribution and buy-in throughout the programme.

Our involvement in the project was over several phases:

Invitation to Tender

- Working with the Services to document a robust requirement that service providers could understand and quote against
- Recommending a suite of KPIs that would drive the right behaviours and provide an early warning of bad habits
- Recommending a set of pricing models that would encourage channel shift.

Tender Evaluation

- Including design of evaluation matrix in 3 levels across multiple method statements

Transition Planning

- Reducing transition risks through creating and managing a multi-level project plan that allowed for a managed transition of services over a 4-month period

Service Readiness

- Ensuring that all channel shift opportunities were captured and embedded in the Service Specifications and system scripts, so that the new operating model could be assured

Training

- Developing a multi-faceted induction programme that could bring Westminster to the remote Contact Centre and create a true affinity to the Brand Values and essential behaviours of the Council.

Results

The Contact Centre is at the heart of the new Council Customer Service operating model which is now beginning to deliver:

- The ability for customers to complete end-to-end transactions using self-service, thus enabling channel shift away from telephone and face-to-face channels towards self-service, while delivering improved customer experience
- Empowered Service Partner staff, with a true affinity and appreciation of the Brand, Values and Culture of Westminster City Council
- Efficient and effective assisted self-service where pure self-service is not possible
- Improvements in the back office thus reducing process failure and removing inefficiency
- Customer intelligence to help shape future service delivery
- Cost savings of around £6 Million per annum against the previous Contact Centre contractual arrangement.
- Successful sign-off on the business case from the global CIO and CFO

- Through a formal RfP process, identified a single managed MPLS provider, reducing 30+ WAN vendors to 1. Savings of over US\$1.5m which included a massively increased level of service (from an unmanaged network to a managed service) and complete hardware refresh.
- Through a formal RfP process, identified and negotiated contracts with a data centre supplier to provide two tier-4 data centres in London and Amsterdam.
- Successful approval on the European VOIP strategy and negotiated significant discounts on the VOIP platform.

Programme managed and provided design consultancy for the successful implementation of the MPLS network, the data centres and the Avaya VOIP solution for 7,000 users.